

An abstract line drawing in orange on a pink background. The drawing depicts several tall, thin stems that branch out and end in various geometric shapes, primarily pentagons and hexagons, some of which are filled with smaller geometric patterns. The stems are intertwined and cross each other, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall style is minimalist and modern.

GENDER AND CHANGE

Eds: Maria Jansdotter Samuelsson, Clary Krekula and Magnus Åberg

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POWER, POLITICS AND EVERYDAY PRACTICES

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Gender and change. Power, politics and everyday practices

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Innehåll

Introduction	5
<i>Maria Jansdotter Samuelsson, Clary Krekula and Magnus Åberg</i>	
PART I. POLITICS OF THE EVERYDAY	
State-Recommended Couple Sexuality	9
<i>Hilde Danielsen and Wencke Mühleisen</i>	
Self-Sacrificing Carers, Independent Individuals or Commodities for Sale? Aspects of Maternal Identity in the Swedish Magazine <i>Mama</i>	23
<i>Maria Jansdotter Samuelsson</i>	
Feeling the Speed – the Social and Emotional Investments in Dangerous Road Practices	37
<i>Dag Balkmar and Tanja Joelsson</i>	
From Work-Sharing Couples to Equal Parents – Changing Perspectives of Men and Gender Equality.....	53
<i>Margunn Bjørnholt</i>	
PART II. WORK AND ORGANISATION	
Gender and the Division of Labour in a Swedish Context.....	75
<i>Line Holth, Birgitta Jordansson and Lena Gonäs</i>	
Conditional Equality: When the Higher Educated Meet the Labour Market	95
<i>Lena Gonäs and Kerstin Rosenberg</i>	
Challenging Gender in Teacher Education	113
<i>Maria Hedlin and Magnus Åberg</i>	
Neoliberal Market Imperative in the Name of Gender Equality: Constructions of Gender in the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise ...	127
<i>Ulrika Jansson</i>	
PART III. GENDER EQUALITY IN THEORY AND PRACTICE	
The (dis)Similarity Paradox in Swedish Integration Policies: The Case of Immigrant Women as Templates	149
<i>Lena Grip</i>	

With Equality on the Agenda: An Age Perspective on Swedish
Gender Mainstreaming 165
Clary Krekula

With and Beyond the Concept ‘Woman’: Aspects on Literature,
Criticism and Feminism in the Swedish Postmodern 1980s 177
Anna-Klara Bojö

Sexual Diversity and Sexual Rights: Rethinking Good and Bad Sex..... 195
Solveig Anna Boasdottir

Conceptual Dilemmas, Political Actions, Feminist Questions 217
Mia Liinason

PART IV. GENDER AND CHANGE

From Research to Gender Politics: On Gender Relations,
Identity Politics and Visionary Dialogues 239
Maria Jansdotter Samuelsson, Clary Krekula and Magnus Åberg

Notes on contributors 247

Introduction

*Maria Jansdotter Samuelsson, Clary Krekula
and Magnus Åberg*

The research of gender studies aims, as all other needs oriented research do, to contribute towards a better society with the help of scientific tools. *Change* is therefore a key concept in gender studies. Some research directions investigate the societal changes that affect people's lives, while others let the scientific concepts themselves be tools in the process of change. This places gender studies in a sphere of tension between foundational and applied research, between theory and practice. This dynamic is also characteristic of the work conducted at the Center for Gender Research at Karlstad University.

The Center for Gender Research is based on a cooperation between several areas of study, where the research of the last few years has been characterised by methodical pluralism, a strive for theory development and an orientation towards empirical fields like family, working life and education. The conducted projects have to a great extent been of an applied nature, carried out in close collaboration with organisations, authorities and businesses. This has taken place under the overarching heading *Gender Relations and Processes of Change*. This was also an important theme at the conference on Nordic feminism and gender research that took place in October 2008 at Karlstad University, and where most of the authors of this book participated.

Complex phenomena such as gender relations in motion need to be analysed at different levels, with the help of different methods and based on different types of material. In order to facilitate the processes of change, tensions and conflicts between different results must be brought to light and utilized. The articles of this book show a broad spectrum of methods and choice of material. Perhaps they can also reveal the tensions between different perspectives, which for example deal with the extent that tangible changes in gender relations are in fact possible to detect and to what extent they appear to be reproduced.

The book has three main parts: *Politics of the Everyday*, *Work and Organisation* and *Gender Equality in Theory and Practice*. Under these themes a number of contributions gather to describe and analyse gender relations in different spheres of society. We want to emphasize, which will also be apparent in several of the chapters, that we do not consider these societal spheres as *separate* and independent. Rather, the thematisation aims to allow certain gender aspects to function as a figure, whereas others temporarily

make up the foundation. The broad aim of the book is to demonstrate that critical analyses of gender must be done in all contexts of society. Even the research of gender studies with its theory construction makes up a societal context in itself, and thus it has to be seen from a critical perspective. Several of the authors contribute to this. The final chapter of the book is an attempt to tie the themes of the book closer together, to show how they can be understood collectively. By that we want to point to some of the future challenges that await the research of gender studies.

We hope that this book will contribute to a deeper understanding of gender constructions in different contexts. Hopefully it will also sow more seeds in the constantly ongoing work on renegotiating norms and notions that substantiate gender related power structures.

Part I. Politics of the everyday

State-Recommended Couple Sexuality

Hilde Danielsen and Wencke Mühleisen

How is couple sexuality represented by the Norwegian welfare state? *Living Well Together (Godt Samliv)* was established in 2005 as a couples course for first-time parents in Norway, offered for free through municipal health centres. This public policy initiative is well suited to use as a way of investigating the Norwegian welfare state's construction of normative and gendered couple sexuality.¹ The course focuses on positive steps on how to maintain a lasting love-relationship and parenthood, and presents different tools to help couples solve problems and to communicate better. We will especially concentrate on how sexuality is represented in the course. By 'sexuality' we here refer to discourses on sexuality and when we write 'sex' we refer to 'sexual practice', i.e. 'to have sex' or 'sexual activities'. Our understanding of sexuality is leaning upon Michel Foucault. He describes how phenomena such as sexuality or lust must be treated as a result of a productive power, and not as a natural quality. As such, 'sexuality' stands as a historically produced formation which reflects a specific societal organisation and hierarchical production of the 'sexual' and a system of feelings of sexual desire (Foucault 1977, 191). Thus, we want to explore what ideals and norms concerning couple sexuality that are represented in this state-initiated course. Our analysis also points out how certain forms of intimacy and sexuality are being left out, and thus are not invited into this new 'Norwegian couple sexuality' and shows how the course lacks reflexivity concerning underlying norms. One piece of advice that new parents receive is to make an active effort to maintain a loving relationship and sexuality for the sake of the long-term parenthood and the children. What happens when sex is based on an ethic of spontaneous duty, and is presented as a work investment which both parents should undertake? And how does this model of couple sexuality relate to feminist critique of dominant forms of family life and parenting?

Living Well Together

Norwegian governmental engagement in the shaping of healthy relationships in the public sphere is unique in the world, but similar marriage or relationship courses can be found in at least 76 other countries (Benson and Callan 2009). Public financing of couples courses also occurs in a number of countries, such as Denmark and the USA, where individual states provide support. But Norway is the only country which has developed and organised its own government-

1. Henceforth, we write 'course book' when referring to the *Living Well Together* handbook made for the participants, and 'course leader handbook' when referring to the *Living Well Together* course leader handbook.

financed couples course. The content of the course book, *Living Well Together*, is inspired by the American concept of the course *Prep* (Prevention and Enhancement Program), and by the Norwegian course *Du og jeg og vi to* (You and me and the two of us), developed by the Norwegian National Institute for Public Health. *Prep* is a licensed product imported from the USA, developed by the University of Denver and based on American psychological research on family therapy and on what makes couples stay together or separate (Markman et al. 2001). The course material has twice been adapted to Norwegian conditions, in 1998 and 2005 (Thuen and Lærum 2005, 180). This ‘Norwegianisation’ of the course applied particularly to depictions of gender difference, which were described as more equal than in the more traditional American examples. *Living Well Together* was also adapted to Norwegian political objectives, replacing the American focus on marriage with a more plural discourse, expressed through the explicit inclusion of same-sex couples, stepchildren and adoptive parents in the target group for the public courses. The differences between an American, privatised, therapy-oriented society and a Norwegian socio-democratic welfare state can explain why a marriage guidance course for private organisations and church congregations in the USA was, in Norway, transformed into a government-run course for couples, independent of their marital status. The courses have been implemented without public debate, apart from the ones in the parliament, regarding the legitimisation of the initiative (Ludvigsen and Danielsen 2009). There has been some positive media attention focusing on how the couples experience the courses, however.

Perspectives

The development of couples courses can be understood through the processes of *individualisation*, which have altered the requirements for love, intimacy, sexuality and partnership in couples’ relationships (Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Giddens 1992). Today, couple relationships continually have to be filled with meaning and reflected upon. They have to be shaped and formed, and the individual is assigned responsibility to ensure that the relationship is good enough. This form of governance of the self can also be described with the term *biopolitics*, which refers to forms of social governance and self-governance present when people produce knowledge and truth about themselves (Foucault 2002:68). In this perspective, the individual becomes the central actor in the achieving and practice of norms and ideals. Couples courses can then be considered as training to govern the self, relationships and sexuality, in line with dominant norms. The goal of the individual is not necessarily to fulfil social norms; they are also motivated by the hope of personal happiness and an improved quality of life (Rose 1989, 156).

Thus, these courses can be placed in the historical tradition of popular education and a change of perspective regarding sexuality. Since the post-war period, a healthy heterosexual sex-life is considered beneficial to society, and sex educators have recommended how, and how often, married couples should have sex. Legitimate heterosexuality was reserved to marriage, and at the same time, sexual availability was an obligation within marriage. From the 1970s onwards, the ties between marriage, reproduction and sexuality were loosened, both as a result of new contraceptive technologies, such as the birth control pill, and also as a result of the impact of diverse social movements. Feminists and homo-political interest groups demanded sexual autonomy and emancipation. In today's family politics, as well as in the government-initiated courses for parents and couples, sexuality is to a large extent shaped as a project to control and govern, albeit within a framework of what is represented as the child's best interests and the couple's requirements.

The ideal Norwegian couple

The aim is to maintain your loving relationship beyond your becoming parent. (Course book 2005)

This quote from the course book can be seen as the motto of *Living Well Together*. The course book suggests advice concerning how a couple can maintain 'joy and passion', as described in the book, and how they can keep up their healthy sexual relationship. The course book talks in detail about communication and problem solving, and it provides a common-sense version of love, closer to *friendship* than to passionate emotion (Danielsen and Mühleisen 2009; Danielsen 2008). *Living Well Together* is characterised by the desire to reconcile everyday love with sexual excitement. What do the experts behind the course present as the ideal of 'responsible sexuality' for Norwegian parents today?

Sexuality and intimacy as work

In the course literature, love is synonymous with making a *work contribution*, and sexuality is included within this rhetoric. This can be regarded as a constructionist perspective of love and sexuality which stresses the doable and the optional, instead of the uncontrollable, natural urges, feelings and characteristics (Danielsen and Mühleisen 2009). The course book reads (2005, 26): 'A good reason for starting again [with sexual activities following birth], is that good sex functions as a lubricant for the body – and the relationships.' The defining evidence of love in Western culture is mutual sexual attraction (Stacey 1998). For this reason, absence of sexual desire is a

culturally acceptable reason for separation in Norway today. This implies that a 'proper couple' is a couple that is having sex. Sex requires important work to be done, a contribution and a good investment in the relationship.

It is natural that desire is put to the test now [...] After a while you should work together to get active again. Have sex in new places. Turn off the TV. Go to bed early. Go to bed freshly showered and naked, in a bed with fresh bed-linen, in a warm bedroom with dimmed lighting. (Course book 2005, 5, 26)

Sex is presented as being both of value in itself *and* as a tool to achieve other goals in the relationship. Being called upon to work with your sexuality and learn techniques for communication can come across as *anti-romantic*. The relationship, which in Western romantic discourse is based on authentic, spontaneous, loving and sexually charged feelings, is here presented as something which requires dedicated input. *Work* is becoming a universally accepted metaphor for love, sexuality and a couple's relationship (Kipnis 2004). The model for rule-based communication and conflict resolution presented in the course book, is taken from employment and organisational life, rather than sources which might usually be associated with communication in the private sphere (cf. Danielsen and Mühleisen 2008). This can be conceived as mergers between the private and public spheres, which have become a typical feature of our times. Public life is now characterised by the private, the intimate and the sexual, whereas personal relationships and sexual desires have been subordinated to something resembling tools such as workplace-communication (Attwood 2009; Illouz 2007; Mühleisen 2007).

The sexual advice in the course book indicates that initiated communication and planned sexual activities may arouse desire. Following this line of thought, the book inspires couples to challenge themselves and their sexual habits. For example, it is pointed out that sexual aids may stimulate some people, whereas others consider them overrated, and the course book (2005, 26) concludes it in this way: 'Is it worth a try? And what if you find an erotic magazine in your partner's drawer: Could you take a look too?'

This advice stands in contrast to mainstream Norwegian feminist critique of pornography and sexualisation (Mühleisen 2007), but is in line with general self-help and guidebooks on sexuality. Instead of viewing spontaneous arousal as an essential precondition for sex, the text presents the idea that rationally planned sexual activities may serve as an entrance to the sought-after sexual desire. Even though there is a great deal of advice in

the public domain concerning how you can take control and work towards a better sex life (which is also how the state-initiated relationship course expresses it), Western notions about sexuality and desire are, at the same time, based on concepts of natural urges, authenticity and deep emotions. The course book states (2005, 24): 'For many, sex is a doorway to feelings of closeness, love and caring – the most intimate and fragile emotions we have.'

In other words, the main rationale behind the sexual 'work' prescribed in the course book, only achieves its goal if the *end-result* is closeness, intimacy and psychological depth. In this sense there exists an ambivalent message in the course book. On the one hand the couples are guided to seek authenticity, depth and emotion, while on the other hand they are supposed to follow rationally planned communication and sexual initiative to generate desired changes. Based upon this analysis we propose that the main ethos of couple sexuality in *Living Well Together* is one of duty, or rather a *spontaneous duty* which fuses sex as spontaneity and authenticity and sex as work.

The endeavours of the course to teach couples techniques to maintain their sexual desire are shared by much of the literature on sex and relationships found on the market. The reason behind this unison call for an investment in sexual activity in this relationship literature is, as described earlier, the ideal that a couple's relationship should be based on mutual sexual attraction. Sexologists go along with this construction of dominant notions about the normal Norwegian couple, as this quote from sexologist Elsa Almås illustrates: 'Normally functioning couples have sex one to two times a week' (*Dagbladet* 2001). At the same time, the mass of advice and tips on how to maintain sexual excitement suggests that it might be difficult to sustain sexual interest over a long period.

Three different possibilities can be suggested to counter a lack of sexual spark in a couple's relationship. The first alternative has its foundation in acceptance that other interests and common responsibilities give additional meaning to the couple's (and parent's) relationship. The second alternative is to accept that sexual interest shifts (to some extent) over to other relationships. The third alternative starts out with adding resources and techniques to counter falling sexual desire in a relationship. This last option is the alternative provided by the course book, and goes along with the current dominant relationship ideal, although statistics for divorce and separation show that many do not attain or even wish to live up to this norm.

Equal, gender-neutralised sexuality

We know that experiencing a fair distribution of work between both partners is important for the quality of a relationship. (Course book 2005, 51)

Equality and democratization have become a brand for the Nordic heterosexual couple (Dahl 2005, 49; Magnusson 2006; Røthing 2004). Accordingly, equality stands as an explicit and implicit norm for the normality of a relationship in *Living Well Together*. The course book can be said to support the stereotypical representations of gender-equality as a part of Norwegian culture (cf. Lotherington 2008, 13). The ideal of equality is based on a vision of romantic love between emancipated women and confident men who transcend power structures linked to gender, and who base relations on respect and equal value (Dahl 2005, 49). The preconception in the course book is that the couples are *already* on equal footing, but at the same time they get suggestions as to how they can become even *more* equal. Questioning equality as a value in itself is not an option.

With equality as a precondition for, and a characteristic of, Norwegianness in long-term relationships how is this 'equality of sexuality' in *Living Well Together* characterised? Sexuality is presented in a predominantly *gender-neutralised* manner. It is entered in a context of a generous and value-equal exchange of services: 'For exhausted parents of small children, care and generosity are an undervalued door opener to sexual desire, not to mention important in themselves. You rest a bit while I tidy up in here' (Course book 2005, 26). When the book refers to differences in sexual desire it portrays this, with few exceptions, gender-neutrally. Ambitions of change in sexual behaviour in equality policies often focus on the 'problematic male sexuality' (Kulick 2005, 95), but in *Living Well Together* both women and men are urged to take a self-critical look at the nature of desire. Gender neutralization can be interpreted as avoiding the reinforcement of gendered and sexual stereotypes, which might reduce the negotiation space of some individuals. It can also be understood as 'closing the ranks' with regards to equality, in that it is taken for granted that women and men are *already* equal and wish to be so. Whilst the central plot of sexuality today has been based on the assumption that the sexes are intrinsically different, we see here the contours of a late modern Norwegian sexual ethic based on equality, gender-neutrality and democratisation. In part, this runs against American relationship literature, e.g. *Fighting for your Marriage* (Markman et al. 2001), which to a large extent takes its starting point in the differences in sexuality between genders. Ideals of gender equality function as a precondition in this new Norwegian sexual

ethic. This takes up gender quality as an imagined reality and ideal, and criticises a heterosexual norm in which gender difference contains masculine dominance and feminine subordination. This new relationship ethic can function as an ideal to strive for, but at the same time it can make it more difficult to take up differences and power struggles. It is a feature of the course book that inequality and power differences between genders are not brought up.

The course promotes that relationships will last through the development of what we could call ‘the healthy and beneficial sexuality’. The socio-anthropologist, Don Kulick, describes ‘good sex’ in Sweden – Norway’s neighbouring country – in a manner which fits this discourse on sexuality precisely:

That is, it must be socially approved, mutually satisfying sexual relations between two (only two) adults or young adults who, from a social perspective are more or less exactly equal. There can be no discussion of money or any other form of open dominance, not even as roll-play, and it should take place within the framework of an already established relationship. (Kulick 2005, 76 own translation)

This version of sexuality, as being based on responsibility and equality, and which is also reflected in the course book, can be characterised with the slang expression ‘vanilla sex’, i.e. harmless and beneficial sex. Our point is that the sexuality presented in the course excludes any significant variation of sexual practice. It ignores aspects of sexuality which are not necessarily stabilising, but which can potentially generate conflicts.² Voluntary abstention from sex, or absence of desire in a relationship, is presented as threatening and as a problem which should be solved. Sex which is not linked to authenticity and psychological depth or to the maintenance of the relationship, is absent from the course book.

We can assume that at an existential level, sexuality is experienced as meaningful for communication and social integration. At the same time it can *also* be experienced, knowingly or otherwise, as a potentially disintegrating and at times destructive force (Bersani 1988). As the sexuality described in the course book is based on closeness, mutuality and transparency, this can lead to individualisation and privatisation of these conflicting experiences. A one-sided focus on harmonising sexuality can cause differences, distance and power to disappear as complicating factors in relationships and as potential elements of sexual desire. Furthermore, the course representation of a

2. If we ignore the conflict connected to lack of sexual desire discussed.

‘responsible sexuality’ stands in contrast to prevailing cultural representations of sexuality. Within film, literature and art, sexuality is often presented as something dramatic and full of conflicts that are associated with differences of power, and potentially violent (Mühleisen 2005). Conflicts connected to gender, class and ethnicity, provide fuel for late modern cultural notions of sexuality, in contrast with the notions of equal and consensual sexuality represented in *Living Well Together* which risk that couple sexuality is romanticised.

Normalisation and othering

Living Well Together has a political goal of ensuring secure and long-term sexual couple relationships for the good of the child, and that sexuality and intimacy are presented as something which requires discipline and work. Open-mindedness, equality and gender neutrality are presented as Norwegian core values and point towards a Norwegian sexual ethic. What then, does not have a place in the state’s recipe for a couple’s sexuality? What values and practices are othered through *Living Well Together*? In the following we will investigate the consequences of this rhetoric of diversity in the development of the course.

The political process around the relationship course reflects – as we referred to in the introduction – a desire to include diverse family structures, but in practice leans towards the norm of a heterosexual nuclear family. The course book contains the same duality. The course book states a desire to embrace more than the Norwegian, heterosexually oriented couple.

First-time parents are not a homogeneous group. There are young, heterosexual couples who have their first child together; same-sex couples; adoptive parents; couples in which one or both of the partners have children from previous relationships; couples of different ethnicity; couples who have grown up in different parts of the country or different countries altogether; first-time parents who do not live together; couples with disabilities; senior couples with many years of cohabitation before their firstborn arrive – to name but a few. (Course book, 2005, 3)

This citation shows that in principle, the couple norm expressed in *Living Well Together* is tolerant of sexual differences, lifestyles, adoption, cultural and ethnic differences, and disabilities. Apart from mentioning these differences, the course book does not, however, focus any further attention on differences from the traditional, white, heterosexual, long-term parenting couple. Even though ‘the same-sex couple’ is mentioned on page 14 and 15 in the course

book, the handbook for the course-leaders (2005, 19) emphasises that ‘it would of course seem artificial to spend time on the topic of homosexuality or adoption if this does not apply to any of the couples.’

In this way differences such as homosexuality and adoption are constructed as some kind of deviation relevant only ‘to whom this may apply’ and ‘the others’. The differences are presented as *essential* differences which have no relevance to ‘the majority’. The sexuality and identity of the majority are on the other hand concretised, represented and expressed as the normal assumption, out of which other differences are defined, and deviate from. Normality is presented as uniform with heterosexuality as a premise, the Norwegian national majority as a given, biological parenthood as the norm, and deviations from this norm as only being of concern ‘to whom this may apply’ and thus not included in the norm.

Against this background we can assert that the course book, despite assurances of diversity, implies an *othering* of those groups listed in the previous quote. Homosexual and heterosexual lifestyles stand as mutually exclusive, thereby constructed as essential differences and in need of a separate representation. This understanding of homo- and heterosexuality as essential differences and either-or categories are, and has been, decisive for Norwegian sexual politics (Mühleisen, Røthing and Svendsen 2009). One instance in the course book makes a reference to lesbian couples as an experience from which ‘the majority’ can learn something. The emotional and sexual life of lesbian couples is put forward both as an additional challenge and an extra advantage.

It is widely known that many lesbian couples have trouble maintaining excitement, and in keeping their sexual lives functioning over time. As with other couples, this can be a challenge with babies in the house. On the other hand it is understood that, to a large degree, lesbian women adopt other forms of physical and emotional closeness than the purely sexual. Something which can be an advantage when a young baby can mean that time and energy are in short supply. (Course book 2005, 14)

This quote relies upon two hetero-gendered stereotypes: One stereotype touches upon the common cultural assumption that women have less sexual desire than men (‘It is widely known that many lesbian couples have trouble maintaining excitement’). The other stereotype is based on the assumption, that a man (a penis) is required to sexually activate a woman (which is ‘lacking’ in a lesbian relationship). Even though the course book presents a positive norm of sexuality constituted upon gender-equality, it paradoxically

presents same-genderedness as a problem for lesbian desire. Despite the fact that gender equality and gender neutrality are the ideal, gender difference becomes implicitly manifested as the privileged lust-generating difference.

Making lesbian partnerships a visible entity is an inclusive intention of the course. At the same time, this does not involve a true inclusion of differences connected with forms of family, parenthood and sexuality. Instead, the assumption is that difference can be assimilated into the template for the Norwegian, gender neutral (hetero), normal, parental couple. Therefore, the same-sex couple, or the couple with an ethnic minority background, can advance, so to speak, into the Norwegian couple normality *if* they practice family, parenthood and sexuality in the expected manner. This normalisation process can be defined with help of the term *heteronormativity*, which refers to the sanctioning of rules that force us to conform to hegemonic, heterosexual standards of identity. In line with the goal of preventing separation, parenthood which does *not* assume the gender equal, heterosexual, cohabiting couple is not brought up in *Living Well Together*, with the exception of the aforementioned extract on lesbian couples. The consequence of this is that same-sex couples and couples with ethnic minority backgrounds are now offered a separate course. On the one hand this can be understood as a relevant recognition of differences, but on the other this special treatment involves an ‘othering’, whilst heteronormativity is not addressed.

This tendency of normalisation and othering is obviously not unique to *Living Well Together*. These mechanisms are, however, part of the heteronormalisation which pervades society’s institutions and culture. Even though the course urges couples towards reflexive communication, discourses concerning intimacy and sexuality are less reflexive in relation to the societal and cultural norms and ideals which Norwegian couples are surrounded by and which *Living Well Together* promotes. This lack of reflexivity concerning ideals and norms is a pervasive tendency in Norwegian couples courses and couple therapy (Øfsti 2008). The text in the course book is virtually exclusively focused on the individual and private challenges of partners in a relationship. This can seem paradoxical when this urge for reflexivity is a main goal for the course:

Therefore the course is only shaped to a small degree towards giving advice. The key element in the creation of *Living Well Together* is on the other hand *an invitation to reflection* [...] (Course book 2005, 3-4, own italics).

The dominant norms for partnership, intimacy, parenthood and sexuality in a culture which encompasses couples and which lies as the fundament for the advice and suggestions in the course book, are brought into the course book as concrete topics for discussion only to a small degree. As such, the course is at risk of reproducing dominant norms which it originally wished to counter or leave open for discussion.

Sexuality as a tool to govern the couple

What Norwegian ideals and norms about sexuality have we shed light upon in this analysis of the couples course *Living Well Together*? The main message communicated in the course for couples and first-time parents, and in the handbook guiding the practical course, is that relationships are malleable, and that love requires direction and work. In our material, a discourse about couple sexuality in the Norwegian context becomes visible. It is based upon an ideal of gender equality, gender neutrality, democratisation and an inclusive diversity concerning new forms of family and parenting. The governmental engagement aims at supporting couples to direct their relationships, and views this work as an investment for society. The political intention is that the course should be available to everybody, independent of the nature of the couple, their financial or their social status. The attempt to include same-sex couples, couples of minority backgrounds, and step families, and to consider cohabitants and married couples as equal, can be understood as an expression of the Norwegian vision of democratic equality and inclusion.

The course itself fronts a 'responsible sexuality' for the benefit of couples, parents and society. Contemporary normality is placed within the framework of the Western majority's dominant version of long-term or serial-monogamous, heterosexual partnerships. Parenthood is presented as a central task for couples, and mutual sexual attraction is seen as an essential quality in lasting relationships, and thus it is in the child's best interest. Public engagement in private life through the couples course *Living Well Together*, seeks to strengthen parents responsibility for their own emotional and sexual well-being. *Living Well Together* is formed by a wish to combine everyday love with sexual excitement. Sexuality is placed as the key benefit to lasting relationships and parenthood. This 'soft, pedagogic power' which the state promotes to guide couples, involves offering tools which can lead to the formation of a personality in harmony with moral ideas and political processes which the individuals can internalise (Rose 1989, 261). The course literature focuses on the fact that one can shape a good relationship through disciplined investment in intimacy and sexuality. Duty and spontaneity are woven together. Voluntary renouncement from sex, or absence of desire in a relationship, is presented as a problem which should be worked on.

Gender equality is both a norm and an implicit assumption, and the course stresses gender neutrality rather than gender difference and barely considers gendered power and conflict. This Norwegian normality functions as a dominant template into which various differences associated with sexual orientation and ethnic minority can be assimilated into.

Does *Living Well Together* lead to a stabilisation of conventions concerning couple sexuality, or does the course at the same time challenge these? The course maintains norms of sexuality as stabilising glue in a couple's relationship. At the same time friendship, communication and reflexivity gain central value in a couple's relationship, which potentially involves a de-dramatisation of the central role of sexuality in the definition of a couple. Idealising this combination of friendship and sexuality in a stable, long-term relationship provides arguments for working on the relationship. It is our opinion that the course is also in the process of promoting something else. We have portrayed this as the contours of a Norwegian sexual ethic based on the idea that love and relationships are manageable processes, and with a vision of a democratic sexuality in which gender equality and gender neutrality are the ideals. This can be seen as forms of self-governing and self-regulation (Rose 1998, 123). Foucault has pointed out that through these mechanisms of governing and self-governing, the individual becomes the central actor to fulfil and act upon norms and ideals (Foucault 2002, 68). At the same time we have pointed to the fact that with the course focus being on consensus and harmony, as well as equality and gender neutrality, it can make course participants blind to existing inequalities and power differences. A focus on inequalities could carry a potential for countering the romanticisation of couple sexuality that the course is promoting. This, together with the lack of reflexivity regarding normative claims in the course, could cause the course to strengthen traditional gender norms.

The political consensus around the implementation of the course illustrates an agreement in Norway to support couples with children in the strengthening of their relationships and mutual sexuality. This reflects how sexuality no longer has reproduction as its ultimate end, but instead serves a range of purposes, including lust, the establishment and maintenance of relationships, and signifying lifestyle choices (Plummer 2003, 19). *Living Well Together* can be seen as part of the dominant trend in Norwegian sexual politics in recent years. The regulation of sexual relationships in Norway and its inclusive politics convey an ambition to assimilate different forms of sexuality and relationships into the model of the gender equal, heteronormative, parenting couple. Marriage, or the 'patriarchal nuclear family', so widely attacked by feminism and queer activists in the 1970s, now seems to have become the norm for all sexual relationships, regardless of gender and sexuality.

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Self-Sacrificing Carers, Independent Individuals or Commodities for Sale? Aspects of Maternal Identity in the Swedish Magazine *Mama*

Maria Jansdotter Samuelsson

Self-sacrifice, nurturance and independence as aspects of motherhood

Historically, religion and culture in general have been in a dialectical relation when it comes to discourses of motherhood. It can be argued that the norms of motherhood within Western culture has to some degree been modelled on the life of Mary, mother of Jesus, which in turn has been interpreted in different ways depending on the cultural context. The common, patriarchal interpretation of the features of Mary's motherhood has been that Mary gives up her own free will in order to obey God the Father and serve both him and his son (Grenholm 2007). Self-sacrifice and obedience to male relatives, in particular to husbands, have been unwanted or unachievable characteristics for many mothers, despite its status as a prioritised norm, administrated by religious and social institutions. Women's history is filled with unmarried mothers suffering the consequences of not fitting into the norm of restrictions on female sexuality in a patriarchal society. Motherhood within the sphere of marriage has been defined as the proper expression of female sexuality, while paradoxically thought of as an essentially asexual position. Besides self-sacrifice and obedience, nurturance has been seen as another female virtue, and more or less obligatory in terms of respectable motherhood.

But as always, there is not just one possible interpretation of motherhood, or of Mary as a mother. Movements for feminism, gender-equality and women's rights have called for awareness of the negative consequences of motherhood, especially motherhood as a position that has limited the possibilities for women's full participation and authorization in all parts of society (Johnson and Schaab 2010; Grenholm 2010). Feminist theologians and scholars of religion have sometimes challenged the patriarchal interpretations of Mary. Such alternative discourses focus on Mary as an independent young woman, strong enough to stand up against the norms of women and motherhood of her time. Making use of Mary to empower mothers has also been common among ordinary women in the Roman Catholic Church for a long time, often in intercultural contexts (Bidegain 2010; Puente Lutteroth 2010). Such critical reinterpretations of metaphors of motherhood are of importance when challenging, not only patriarchal theology, but also general social and

cultural hindrances for mothers' to develop their capabilities and interests outside the narrow scope of family life.

Within the secularised Swedish culture of today, religious influences on common world views have declined, although they might still dwell in the depth of our cultural memory. The situation is rather similar in Western culture in general. While the preaching of the Church and the words of sermons, as well as of the canonised texts of Christianity, were previous¹ mediators of norms, ideals and notions of motherhood, the main areas of influence today are secular and of a different kind. Motherhood is an identity position among several others to be conquered and constructed within the framework of current cultural discourses (Woodward 1997). The secular cultural discourses of motherhood that are most widespread today are likely to include critical interpretations of traditional motherhood. Yet at the same time, similar interpretations of motherhood that operated within the Christian tradition, focusing self-sacrifice as a key element and nurturance as a wanted virtue, are likely to be found still today. For me as a scholar of feminist religious studies, not only interested in religious traditions, but also in philosophies and ideologies as communicators of norms, values and ideals related to gender, it is interesting to turn to popular discourses on motherhood, in search of current interpretations and norms of being a mother.

Identity, motherhood and popular cultural discourses

The media today is one of the most powerful arenas for the construction of identities. The relation between texts produced by the media and the socio-cultural views of life are dialectical, just like the relation between religious texts and culture. Texts are formed in a certain socio-cultural context, while also reproducing and constituting views of life in a creative way. Those texts do not only reflect the context, they also create their own version of it. People in the media construct the themes and issues they deal with, they create norms and moral codes (Böök and Perälä-Littunen 2008). The starting point of this article is the understanding of motherhood as a process of positioning and construction, related to the different discourses of motherhood that is to be found in a certain context. In wider society, there are dominant discourses of motherhood which individual mothers are aware of and use as models to construct their own position as mothers. A dominant discourse tends to be understood as true, and as such, it has a strong influence on the perceptions of life. These dominant discourses might be competing with one another in terms of their ideals, norms and values, which often lead to existential

1. However, it should not be ignored that religion can still be seen by many as an active and direct influence on the ideals of motherhood, also in a Western context.

tensions within the individual's construction of an identity of motherhood (Elwin-Novak 1999).

To find contemporary representations of motherhood, women's magazines could be seen as a potentially rich source (Woodward 1997), especially with regards to magazines aimed at mothers. In Sweden at the moment, there is only one monthly magazine which focuses directly on mothers – *Mama*, founded in 2002. Among all the usual things offered to the reader of a standard women's magazine, women are often encouraged to picture themselves in the image of the magazine's cover star (Thornham 2000). Each issue of *Mama* has one major article based on an interview with the mother on the cover. Those mothers are usually national, minor or major, celebrities, e.g. models, singers, actresses, popular authors, journalists or TV-personalities.

There are, of course, no simple patterns here that allow for an assumption that mothers reading this type of magazine uncritically adopt the message of how to act as a mother – some aspects will be accepted and some will be rejected or read from a critical perspective, depending on the reader. However, it is undoubtedly so, that magazines of this kind have an impact and an ability to shape notions of motherhood in its own cultural context. It could also be argued, that the influence of these magazines are limited because of their tendency to represent white middle-class notions of motherhood. (In the case of *Mama*, the scope is even narrower because of its focus on celebrity mothers.) The contexts of working-class women and women of non-Western ethnicities do not seem to be addressed at all. True as this might be, the images presented by the magazines could be understood as the motherhood ideal that anyone would strive for, regardless of whether those ideals are socially and economically possible to reach or not (Burke Odland 2010). Of course, the ideal is unachievable for a lot of women, which might add a dimension of disappointment and frustration to the identity-project of motherhood (Trice-Black 2010). As culture and religion are intertwined with each other, it is likely to be the case that previous religious ideals of motherhood also to a great extent were coloured by a hegemonic middle-class discourse. There are, for example, evidence in recent Swedish research that the ideals of motherhood in religious rhetoric from the early 20th century had a strong middle-class bias, which must have been a source of great frustration to all of those mothers in socially and economically unprivileged groups who were exposed to this biased rhetoric (Södling 2010).

Discourses of motherhood in the 21st century

At a quick glance, the ideal Western mother of today seems to be a successful, full-time professional, exploring and expressing her individuality, adding an

attractive look to her autonomous person. Men do not play a major part in her life, even if they appear now and then to engage in longer or shorter relationships with her, the mother. It is a new essence of motherhood, with *independence* and *career* as operative keywords. The more traditional essence of motherhood, caring for home and family matters, is not in focus in the same way as it was before (Woodward 1997).

Previous research on the construction of Swedish motherhood today, has showed that it is partly dependent on a discourse of equality, where both mothers and fathers are expected to work outside the home and earn their own money, in addition to sharing the burdens of housework and caring for their children. This discourse has its roots in socialist and/or liberal feminism, but could also fit into the discourse of *maternal empowerment*. Maternal empowerment is about safeguarding the agency, authority, authenticity and autonomy that mothers have been denied in patriarchal discourses of motherhood. Maternal empowerment challenges nuclear-family ideals, and promotes alternative family structures – single mothers, parents of same sex, stepfamilies and so on. In the discourse, there is also a mission of not fostering children according to traditional gender identities (O'Reilly 2010).

Previous research has also made clear that in the Swedish example, the gender equality discourse competes with an equally strong – though rarely articulated in the official political agenda – discourse of more traditional views and values, where mothers are supposed to be more engaged in home and family matters because they have a better capability to deal with the care and nurture of others (Elwin-Novak 1999). This could be understood as an articulation of the discourse of *new momism* (O'Reilly 2010). There is also reason to mention the *postfeminist* discourse, which is likely to be operative as a third discourse with influence on motherhood. The distinctions between professionalism and domesticity, feminism and femininity are blurred within a discourse where one is thought to be able to 'have it all'. Independence on the one hand, and traditional virtues of caring on the other, are vivid within this discourse, fragrant with traditional ideals of feminine beauty and heterosexual coupledness. The postfeminist discourse might be aware of gender discrimination as an existing phenomenon, but lacks the analysis of unequal gender relations as a structural problem in need of structural, political solutions. A lacking awareness of power structures – gendered, as well as those based on ethnicity, class or sexuality – is what separates postfeminism from the discourse of maternal empowerment. Instead, focus is placed on personal and sexual empowerment. Feminism in this discourse becomes synonymous with individual empowerment, and is often articulated within textual and visual media productions, mostly directed to a white, heterosexual, youthful and affluent group of women (Genz 2009; Genz and Brabon 2009).

Consumerism and motherhood

The traditional dependence on a male partner and the restrictions of female sexuality have been looked upon as two of the basic causes of women's social, cultural and economic subordination. There are good reasons to presume that those traditional conditions for women's subordination have continuously declined in Western society in the last decades, following the political agendas on safeguarding women's social and economic autonomy, as well as their access to political decision making. The liberal, ideological paradigm has had a predominant influence on Western society, with its promotion of individualism. Combined with a liberal market economy, individuality has to a great extent become dependent on the consumption of commodities, forming an envelope of individuality to hide in (Thornham 2000).

Consumerism is, no doubt, influential within the discourses of motherhood, whether referring to postfeminism or new momism. A professional woman earns her own money, which she is expected to use on accessories in order to create the perfect image of herself as an attractive woman with attractive children and a nice home. If she does not earn her own money, she is still expected to have the financial means to arrange a beautiful family and a lovely home. Consumerism tends to strengthen the ideal of female beauty and attractiveness. The feminist philosopher, Luce Irigaray, argues that women are especially vulnerable to the consequences of consumer society. Women are turned into commodities, while they at the same time, of course, are consumers. They consume the items of the lifestyle that they wish to be a part of. They are expected to label themselves, declare their content to the ones who would like to consume them (Thornham 2000; Oliver 2000).

Scholars like bell hooks and Zygmunt Baumann have also critically discussed what they interpret as a cultural obsession of individual independence and fulfilment of individual, short-term needs and interests in the light of consumerism. There is an obvious risk that humans and human relations are turned into commodities to be acquired, and something which can be exchanged for something else when they are worn out for one reason or another (hooks 2000; Baumann 2003). The depth of, if not the necessity of, human relations are challenged, which is likely to also affect the norms of care and nurturance, which have been part of the traditional female virtues. This is the framework of the critical analysis of the connections between classical liberal ideology and feminism, recently done by Swedish feminist, Nina Björk. From her point of view, mainstream feminism made a mistake in its generally uncritical embrace of the liberal dogmas of the autonomous individual. It is an illusion to think of human beings as solitary creatures; humans can only fully develop within a complex network of relations to the environment and their fellow humans. A particular problem from a feminist

perspective, is that the liberal paradigm does not include experiences of dependence and caring skills from the traditional sphere of women as being politically important next to the privileged male illusion that we are all rational independent subjects (Björk 2008).

Material, purpose and posed questions

The purpose of the article is to investigate aspects of the discourses of motherhood that operate within the stories of the cover stars in the Swedish magazine for mothers, *Mama*, during 2008 and 2009. The magazine releases 13 issues each year.

The stories of the *cover moms* are analysed with particular interest being paid to the themes of *mother and partner* and *mother as an individual*. Attention will be given to the mother's independence and right to prioritise her own needs as an individual on the one hand, and to her dependence and self-sacrifice on the other, as well as nurturance as a motherly virtue.

Approaches to these themes are of interest within the discourses of *maternal empowerment*, *new momism* and *postfeminism*. While maternal empowerment and postfeminism both advocate economically and socially autonomous women, as well as independence from a (male) partner, postfeminism also generally includes a heterosexual norm, with romantic references. New momism expresses the latter as well, but in a more traditional way, combined with an ideal of mothers as better suited for caring and nurturing tasks, which is likely to lower the expectations on mothers to develop as individuals.

The result will be critically analysed within the context of consumerism as a dominant discourse and its possible potential to challenge or confirm ideals of motherhood.

Analysis

Mother and partner

One important dimension of maternal empowerment and postfeminism is to safeguard the mother's autonomy – socially and economically. Within the analysed material, it is the independence from the (male) partner which has been most prominent. Interestingly enough, it is emotional independence from the (male) partner that is expressed in most cases. Furthermore, the norm of the biological nuclear family is challenged, which is in line with the discourse of maternal empowerment. Stepfamilies, adoptive families and single mothers relying a lot on their circle of friends, are represented among the cover moms' stories. However, it is striking how those alternative family arrangements are still firmly placed within a heterosexual framework, which does not make them as radical as might be the case within a discourse of maternal empowerment.

Pernilla S tells the readers that she is a single mother with an adoptive child.

There is a male partner somewhere in the periphery of her life, but they do not live together, and he is not the adoptive father of the child, who Pernilla adopted as a single mother. Pernilla and her partner do not seem to spend too much time together – on weekends she seems to prefer activities together with her daughter, friends and relatives, rather than being with her male partner.

Doreen is a single mother of two children. They have different biological fathers. Doreen prefers to think of her circle of friends as her family.

Ann lives separated, but not divorced from, her male partner. The children divide their time between each parent, and sometimes the whole family come together in one of the parents' home.

Among the celebrity moms, there are also examples of mothers living in biological nuclear families in the traditional meaning. Common to several of these stories, however, is that the male partner seems to play a peripheral role, while the mother manages just fine on her own and together with her children and friends.

Charlotte informs that she is married, but in practice she is a single mother because of her husband's work as a restaurant manager, which keeps him away from home most of the time, except on Sundays. She is not too bothered about this – her two children are social and emotional compensation enough. Besides, it is easier to manage on her own; her husband messes things up and disrupts the routines with the children when he is at home. Her evenings are, every now and then, spent together with friends who come over when the children have gone to bed.

Gry is married with one child. She does not look upon her marriage as something that is likely to last forever. It is not realistic to make lifelong promises, and she was raised by a divorced mother herself. From experience she knows that such an arrangement can be a very happy one, also for the child. If her partner would show interest in other women, that would be OK with her even if they were in a relationship – if that would make him happy, why not?

Ann, who we heard about earlier, arranges her own family life in an untraditional way, and worries about what could be seen as signs of new momism among her friends and acquaintances: she is bothered about the trend of mothers going back to life in the home and the kitchen, working part-time, while keeping a husband with lots of working hours away from home.

Those signs of a backlash that Ann is worried about is not very common in the cover moms' stories. However, a few of the mothers do express some things that are similar to a traditional high value of marriage/cohabitation and family – where the dependence that traditional family life brings cannot be avoided - even though they might have gone through a divorce themselves, some more than once. In these stories there are seeds of what could be a discourse of new momism, where caring and nurturing skills are seen as ideal and prioritised skills for women and mothers, while financial and emotional independence are not articulated as particularly strong key concepts.

Magdalena is recently divorced. She has two children with her former husband, and one child from a previous relation. She believes in marriage – one should try to make it work until there is no other way out. Children need a father, a father teaches them to be obedient, better than a mother does. Magdalena is not financially independent. She had no income for 10 years as the house-wife of an elite football player, but now she is fighting for her right to have half of the money that they got from selling a luxury apartment while they were married.

Susanne has had the same partner for 28 years, since the time when they were both teenagers. Around 40 they had their first child, and then another two arrived shortly after each other. She is working from home, with her youngest child staying at home with her. The other two are in daycare, but only for five–six hours a day. Her husband is away from home a lot, with long working days as an event-coordinator. She takes care of almost all of the daily housework, as well as the everyday care of the children.

But also within these traditional ideals of nuclear-family life, some aspects of maternal empowerment can be found, in terms of male partners and fathers being asked to care of their children and for them to stay close even after a divorce. Nurturance is not only a female, but also a male virtue.

Pernilla W is recently separated from her second long-term relationship. She has also been through a divorce and has three children from her marriage, and one child from her latest relationship. She discusses the fact that she is forever tied to her former partner, because of their child. The child needs them to stay in contact, you cannot simply say 'goodbye'. Maybe you should even try to find your way back into your relationship. Having a child together is a very strong source of companionship. However, this has not been the case with her former husband. He moved abroad after their divorce, and does not seem to be in contact with her or their three children anymore.

Hannah is the only one among the mothers who talks about experiences of what could be seen as negative attitudes towards separation and divorce. She has three children with three different fathers, and says that some people have problems with that, thinking she is a 'slut', and so on.

This depicts Hannah as someone who feels surrounded by traditional family norms which she has not been able to keep up with. However, she does not criticise them out of any maternal empowerment ideals of challenging nuclear-family living. Instead, she seems to stick with the new momist ideal, and feels absolutely confident that this time, it will last; she and her husband are made for each other. Her family is perfect now.

The mother as an individual

In addition to a notion of the mother as someone who is at least emotionally independent of a male partner, the mother is also supposed to be someone who claims her right to express herself as an individual, needing time for her own personal interests and spare time, whether it is physical training, parties or whatever. But interestingly enough, this need is often connected directly to, or perhaps excused by, the child's needs.

Ann tells the readers of *Mama* that she needs a lot of space and time to express her own personality.

Gry says she likes to feel attractive and takes her chances to go out on party-nights on her own every now and then.

Cecilia is recently married and mother of a 9-month-old daughter. She did breastfeed her for 4–5 months, but after that she stopped, since her daughter 'did not want to be breastfed anymore'. Cecilia brings her daughter to work, as well as to parties, and does not think that she should have to give up all the fun because she is a mother. She is provoked by women who think that it is a sign of motherly love to sacrifice themselves and their interests.

Caroline is married with two children and has been in the same relation for 13 years. If she gets to do what she likes and needs, she is happy and subsequently a better mother.

Several of the mothers talk of how they needed to get a divorce or separate in order to have enough time and space of their own.

Mia is divorced, with two children and a new partner. She needed to get a divorce in order to be happy, and is of the opinion that children are happy if their parents are happy.

Jenny is recently divorced, with three children. She has a new boyfriend, but they do not share a household. Jenny is very satisfied with her status as a single woman – for her it is a wonderful feeling to make her own living.

Critical discussion

An analysis of the cover stars' stories in *Mama*, shows that the dominant discourse have a lot in common with the postfeminist ideal of women's economic and emotional independence, and professionalism combined with motherhood, as well as an interesting and busy leisure time. The radicalism and the awareness that are implicit in the movement of maternal empowerment are not really communicated by the cover moms. Signs of the new momist discourse do not represent the stories, although parts of the discourse could be found among some of the mothers.

Mother and partner

Independence from a male partner is a common theme in the *Mama* stories. Relationships are not portrayed as eternal. They might be relatively long-lasting, but divorce, periods of experimenting with new partners, followed by remarriage or re-cohabitation, are common within the stories. Such a relational pattern is not a novelty and has been discussed by, for example, family sociologist Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim. The pattern of breaking up and establishing new relationships seems to be self-generating. If a couple doubts the durability of their marriage or cohabitation, they tend to invest less in the relation, which makes the relation more likely to end. If there is little to lose, there is little to gain (Beck-Gernsheim 2002). This clearly fits into the critical analysis by scholars such as hooks and Baumann, on patterns of superficial or short-term relationships, turning individuals into commodities on a relational market. However, from a different point of view, the stories told by the cover moms make it clear that the high priority given to individual values and interests – which is communicated by a lot of mothers, though not by everyone – is not an aim for a singles' society either. Intimacy and relationships are held as important. Although independence from a partner, whether it is within a relationship or not, might be cherished in the stories, such independence usually runs parallel with explications on the importance of networks of friends to rely on. Networks that might very well be more stable over time than couple relationships. Despite this, alternative relational arrangements, such as arranged collective living, are not mentioned in the cover moms' stories in *Mama*, which leads to the conclusion that although the traditional nuclear family seems to have lost its status as a long-term arrangement, its monopoly on the prioritised way of living has not vanished when it comes to shorter periods of time. Scholars, such as Beck-Gernsheim,

are of the opinion that marriage and the nuclear family might be glorified today more than ever because of the existential shortcomings that seem to be characteristic of Western, hyper-mobile societies, stripped of all traditions and cultural belonging (Beck-Gernsheim 2002).

The mother as an individual

If a person finds she is unhappy, the source of the problem is, according to the individualist discourse, usually to be found in her lack of self-appreciation, self-care and self-concern. She should ask herself the question 'What is in it for me?' more often. She should demand from her partner and others to give her more personal space, whatever it might mean (Baumann 2003). Swedish sociological research has previously identified a discourse of motherhood, where the autonomous woman outside of the mother-child relation is cherished. The well-being of the child is, in this discourse, directly dependent on the well-being of the mother; if she is not happy, then the child is not happy either. The well-being of the mother is also understood as being dependent on a professional career outside of the home, but also on time to care for her fitness, beauty and circle of friends (Elwin-Novak 1999). The norms of self-sacrifice and nurturance that previously characterised the modern Western cultural discourse of the good middle-class mother have declined. Instead there is a new norm of independence that is being cherished. The independence of the mother, however, is conditioned by the well-being of the child. A discursive framework is sketched out by the cover moms of *Mama*, where the fulfilment of the mother's short- or long-term needs is constructed as necessary in order to safeguard the child's happiness and well-being.

Final conclusions

The claims of social and economic autonomy for women have been central to the movement of feminism and gender equality. Claiming such rights for women has been part of the challenging of the objectification of women, by encouraging women to constitute themselves as subjects who are allowed to have desires and to acknowledge and fulfil those desires (Woodward 1997). This is something fundamentally good and necessary, and apparently it is a strong part of the popular discourse of motherhood, communicated by the cover moms of *Mama*. Still, there are reasons to problematise an uncritical cherishing of the ideal of self-fulfilment from a feminist perspective. Interpreted as a result of the expanding consumer culture of Western society, the call for independence and individuality becomes more two-edged in relation to feminist aims of liberating mothers. Consumer culture has never aimed to provide greater freedom for women. If the challenging of previous

norms has led to mothers being 'liberated' as consumers on the one hand, and commodities on the other, there are good reasons to be wary of the way in which the cherishing of individuality is packaged within the popular discourse of motherhood (Thornham 2000).

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Feeling the Speed – the Social and Emotional Investments in Dangerous Road Practices

Dag Balkmar and Tanja Joelsson

Many studies show that there is a dividing line between men and women in their perception of traffic safety. Certainly, a lot of women experience the thrill of speed, but often adjust their speed to avoid accidents. Men tend to overestimate their own driving ability and underestimate the risks on the road. 92 per cent of those convicted of reckless driving (i.e. driving more than 36 per cent above the speed limit) are men. Men use seat belts to a lesser extent than women. 90 per cent of those convicted of drunk driving are men. The largest risk group on the road is young men. In comparison with young women, young men killed eleven times as many pedestrians during the period 1994–2001. (Vägverket 2005, own translation)

In the above cited report by the Swedish Road Administration,¹ concerning gender equality² within the transport sector, traffic accidents are framed as a gendered matter. There is an overall overrepresentation of young men in the statistics over fatal traffic accidents.³ The Swedish Road Administration estimates that every fifth fatally injured person is between 18 and 24 years old. The accidents referred to are single accidents, accidents due to high speed and accidents where the driver has lost control over the car. The same authority holds that one of the most pressing precautions in order to decrease the overall traffic accidents concerns minimising speeding (another concerns substance use). Public discourses surrounding traffic safety issues identify men's overrepresentation in traffic accidents

1. The Swedish Transport Administration, 1 April 2010.

2. Research on traffic and transport has increasingly identified and tried to incorporate issues on gender equality in areas such as transport planning, transport use and transport needs, and in analyses of traffic accidents and fatalities in Sweden (Vägverket 2005, Transgen 2007, Uteng and Cresswell 2008)

3. This is a statistical correspondence on traffic accidents throughout the high-income parts of the world: 'In high-income countries, people aged 15–29 years had the highest death rates per 100 000 population, but in low-income and middle-income countries people 60 years and older had the highest rates [in 2002]' (WHO 2004:13).

and risk-taking on the road, thus making it possible to articulate both the gender and age group of this social problem. However, even though men's overrepresentation in traffic accidents is well known, there is still a striking lack of knowledge of how men construct masculinity within the context of traffic, and a striking lack of the dual dimensions of the power offered by motor vehicles – their pleasurable and their violent sides – that ignite dangerous driving and identify how men construct their identities in relation to motor vehicles (cf. Balkmar and Joelsson 2010). Especially young(er) men tend to be constructed as the (only) problematic category of drivers within the traffic safety discourse.

Having said this, we argue that what is now termed as traffic related incidents, benefit from being scrutinised and perceived from a much broader socio-cultural perspective than has been the case in most of the conventional transport studies on traffic accidents.⁴ Our respective interviewees – young men and women interested in various kinds of motor vehicles – hold driving as much more than transportation. Consider what it means when young men talk about speeding as something that makes you 'damn happy' and 'feels great'. By bringing these 'speeding pleasures' into the debate, we move beyond the confined realm of traffic or transport, and argue for an understanding where the socio-cultural character of the phenomenon is made visible.

The aim of this chapter is to propose a transdisciplinary framework based on socio-cultural theories, to understand why young men as a group make up the largest category in the statistics on traffic related accidents. We suggest that young men (and women) have extensive knowledge about traffic safety, hence making the commonly used approach of the rational agent used in traffic safety campaigns that target young people, redundant. The rewards and motives for using motor vehicles in certain dangerous ways are to be found, we argue, in the cultural and social conceptions of gender, age and motor vehicles. In particular, we wish to use this chapter to show the importance of the sociality – the community – for the persistence of dangerous road practices. Furthermore, the place and role of emotions are put forward as vital ways of articulating this community by creating a fun-seeking subject.

Chapter outline

The following chapter departs from a critical overview of previous research within transport and mobility studies, and relates them to theories of gender and age, as well as science and technology. We withhold the importance

4. There exists a body of work concerned with the psychological aspects of traffic behavior. See e.g. Dul and Geller (2003), Shinar and Compton (2004), Falk (2008) and, for an overview, Summerton and Berner (2002).

of broadening the scope to include social and cultural aspects of vehicle use, also by incorporating an ‘emotio-material’ dimension (cf. Balkmar and Joelsson 2010). We will delve into this by investigating how our research participants depict speeding as fun and pleasurable, and how speed is designed into the car construction as a ‘promise for speed’ (Michael 2001). In addition, following the social rewards of speeding, we illustrate how speed functions as a way of building a community and creates group identities. In the final section we aim to pose some further questions about the relation between gender, technologies of speed and traffic safety.

Towards a new understanding of traffic violations – previous research in perspective

Conventional research on traffic safety has not paid sufficient attention to gender.⁵ Men are clearly overrepresented in most traffic offences, such as speeding, drink driving or driving without proper safety gear. What we find is needed is to bring attention to men’s practices – the way men ‘do traffic’ – as well as the representations and talk surrounding men on the road. What is considered normal? What makes violent and violating road practices possible? The normativity of gendered automobility needs to be addressed: how it shapes and produces subjective experiences and identities, and the way it co-produces and makes violent road practices possible, as well as creating a lack of safety for users and those subjected to others’ vehicle use.⁶

Although our studies are not conventional transport studies, we want to take one of the key areas of study as a point of departure. The phenomenon termed *traffic violations* within the traffic safety discourse, i.e. speeding, reckless driving, driving under the influence, driving unsafe vehicles and failing to maintain proper safety precautions (such as fastening the seat belt), posits a background for our arguments. Traffic violations occur in all age groups eligible for driving, but the conception of the reckless teenage driver (cf. Best 2008) has had consequences for how a dangerous driver is perceived and how the problems associated with this age category are remedied. In short, the perception of the most dangerous driver is most notably *young* and *male*, an image derived from the statistics on traffic accidents.

The association between men, masculinity and machines has a long history indeed (Mellström 1999; Bjurström 1995; Lagergren 1999; Anshelm 2005). Previous research in the field of feminist technology studies – especially in relation to cars and driving – has to a varying degree identified the link

5. Part of this is due to the instrumental character of transport studies, founded on ‘econometric models of traveller behavior based on methodological individualism and a view of transport as if it is just an exchange based transaction’ (Root 2003:1, but see also Urry 2001).

6. This paragraph is a rewritten version of a section in Balkmar and Joelsson (2009).

(Springer 1996; Balsamo 1996; Lupton 1999). Cars and driving, and to a lesser extent mopeds and scooter riding, are traditionally ascribed to the masculine, hence contributing to the creation of a masculine 'power field' from which men draw inspiration in constructing their male identity and power (Mellström 1999; Eldh 2001). The symbolic link between men–masculinity–machine is, as Mellström (2004) points out, culturally significant and is often strongly anthropomorphic in character. The interconnections are of interest to us because physicality, experience, individual personality development and pleasures can be understood in relation to road safety problems.

It is against this backdrop that we find it important to broaden the scholarly scope in order to produce further knowledge on how car cultures and practices are gendered. A vital contribution to conventional research on transport and mobility is how perceptions, notions, cultural understandings and adjacent emotions are part of everyday life (cf. Transgen 2007; Uteng and Cresswell 2008; Letherby and Reynolds 2009). Sheller (2004) argues that a marginalised issue in the research on cars is how the emotional aspects of cars and car driving matter – so much so that 'ethical forms of car consumption have been debated and implemented as if the intense feelings, passions and embodied experiences associated with automobility are not relevant'. Spurred on by Sheller's (2004, 222) call for a more in-depth understanding of motor cultures' attractiveness and persistence, the intense emotions⁷, passions and embodied experiences associated with how people engage with motor vehicles need to be addressed. The implications of this are that motor vehicle cultures encompass social, material and affective dimensions that need to be considered further. We therefore approach individuals' relation to motor vehicles considering the lived (and thus profound) experiences that they have with their vehicles, in all its ambiguity, contradiction and complexity (cf. Sheller 2004).

Ethnographic material

Both our respective studies are based on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with younger men and women interested in motor vehicles – cars, mopeds, A-tractors or quad bikes. Ethnographic studies are a way of learning about an environment by being present and experiencing the setting through the use of all senses, with the aim of understanding

7. We concur with Sheller (2004) that feelings are not located solely within a person, or produced solely by the car as a moving object, but occur as a circulation of affects between persons, cars, and historically situated car cultures and geographies of automobility (Sheller 2004:227). This means that we understand emotions as personally embodied yet a relationally generated phenomenon. Hence, emotions in this perspective are not simply 'felt' and 'expressed', but are rather elicited, invaded, regulated and managed through a variety of expectations, patterns and anticipations (Sheller 2004:226). In the following, we discuss emotions in a vein that emphasise their occurrence, circulation and production in the social realm of traffic.

what everyday life is about in that particular setting. Joelsson's material is composed of observations and field interviews with men and women aged 15–18, oriented towards extensive motor vehicle use, in a smaller peri-urban community, Samplinge, in Sweden. The fieldwork has consisted of (participant) observations of the local youth centre, six group interviews and twelve individual interviews with youths aged 15–18.⁸ In Balkmar's case, the material stems from fieldwork carried out in web forums, in cars, at car shows and in garages. He uses a diverse range of empirical material gathered and created in different contexts, e.g. magazines, videos and interactions in web forums, as well as recorded material from interviews and car shows.⁹ In total, 49 men and 15 women in their mid-20s make up the main part of Balkmar's informants.

Affective technologies

Cars can afford individual users an extension of a person's range of movements through a symbiotic fusion of man and machine, resulting in corporeal experiences of embodied control and power (Lupton 1999). In this vein, car technology can be considered as an integral part of the creation, maintenance and change in how gender and sexuality are constituted. Bjurström (1995, 237) contend that:

For young men, the car, the motorcycle and other motor vehicles appear not only – or even first handedly – as a macho tool. On the contrary, they constitute machines which can be used to measure, test or try one's (understanding of) masculinity.

8. A pilot study was conducted in the spring 2010, in a high school in a larger Swedish city. Six group interviews, one individual interview and school (yard) observations are included in the study, e.g. in the discussions on speed and speeding and the subjective experiences of violating traffic regulations. In addition, seventeen pupils from grade nine in the local high school in Samplinge – not regular visitors of the local youth centre – were interviewed in groups of two or individually. All in all, thirty-five interviews with young people in this community have been executed. In addition, three individual in-depth interviews with the youth centre staff have been performed. Joelsson has also used information from the community's official website and followed the discussions on that website's discussion board about the practices of the neighbourhood-oriented youths, and made use of popular social media networks.

9. Balkmar has engaged in three kinds of interviews: recorded interviews with editors of magazines, recorded interviews with car enthusiasts, and fieldwork 'talks' with car enthusiasts.

Many researchers note that emotions and their effects accrued in the interfaces of the hybrid¹⁰ between (hu)man and machine (Haraway 1994; Barad 2007. Especially related to cars and motorcycles: Sheller 2004; Landström 2006; Mellström 1999; 2004; Redshaw 2007; 2008; Lupton 1999, to name a few). Bjurström (1995, 236) continues by elevating how:

[f]ew other areas of young men's lives supply the combination of embodied experiences, competences, skills and risks that – both in material and symbolic meaning – are part of the potential of the motorcycle and the car.

Lagergren (1999) aptly terms the motorcycle as an experiential tool, stressing the significance of the rider to experience the motorcycle, the driving and the surrounding geography while driving (see Kinnarinen 2005). We have argued elsewhere (Balkmar and Joelsson 2010) that the so-called autoerotic core, is a fundamental part of motor vehicle centred cultures. The concept *autoeroticism* is used as a meaningful way to understand the profoundly embodied and emotional relation between men, technologies of movement and risk-taking. Firstly, it suggests that the male body and technologies of movement are constituted in relation to and through one another, referring to the autonomous as well as the auto-mobile in the concept autoeroticism. Secondly, eroticism refers to an erotic dimension that is self-generated, as well as being created in relation to its surrounding context (see Balkmar and Joelsson 2010). Articulated in the advertising for cars and mopeds, as well as in popular fiction where cars and motorcycles make up a large part of the characters' identity projects, the (erotic) emotional experiences take centrefold – either as a fantasy or experience. Hagman (2010, 30) exemplifies this with the following description of a sports car test in Sweden:

A firm bodywork that will not twist like an eel in the bends, a stiff spring system and amenable steering, a gear level that looks pleadingly at the driver: – Touch me, please! Add to this somebody you like in the passenger seat, some sun-rays and we have a mix called driving pleasure [...] We who work in the test team at *Teknikens Värld* have not had this much fun since we

10. The 'technological human' has become a familiar figuration of the subject of late modernity. This entity relies on a re-conceptualisation of the human body as a 'techno-body', a boundary figure belonging simultaneously to at least two previously incompatible systems of meaning – the organic/natural and the technological/cultural (Balsamo 1996). According to Haraway, we may speak of 'technobodies' referring to the fusions and the increasingly intimate cohabitation between bodies and machines that are taking place in the wake of the current biotechnical and digital revolutions (Haraway 1991). Dant theorises the combination of driver and car as a temporary assemblage, a combination that forms a social 'being' that may be conceived of as bringing about a whole range of social actions – driving, street racing, polluting and killing (Dant 2004:61f). We draw on this theorising of material cultures in a vein that resituate the car and embodied driver as a socio-technical 'hybrid'.

were trimming our first mopeds [...] The Renault Sport Spider [...] has the potential to fill all your senses for as long as you drive it. It is a toy to love, of absolutely no use and completely futile.

The driving appeal of the car is created with the help of an emotional register where the car is depicted as fun, entertaining, seductive, pleasurable and erotic. Identifying already existing cultural scripts in which relations between men, masculinity, technology and desire are continuously consolidated, entails recognising the symbolic link between men–masculinity–machine (Mellström 1999; 2004). These scripts in turn, are materialised in the lived experience of a lot of men – and an increasing number of women – of what it is like to get in the car or on the moped, give it gas and drive (fast). These associations reinforce already existing imaginaries of the car–masculinity nexus in its associations with danger, power and the spectacular. Such associations are signifiers of Western culture based on ‘individualism and getting ahead’, thus providing a form of aggressive mobility at the expense of others (Redshaw 2007, 122). In this sense, masculinity is expressed in relation to specific ways of designing a car where aggressiveness, violence and force are highlighted, rendering the car to be used in certain ways and marketed through rhetoric and imageries of speed as fun and play.¹¹

The associations between motor vehicle construction, design and the imagined user do not merely relate to gendered conceptions and expectations in appearance. The engine potential of the car – its potency – is central for the gendering processes of the hybrid. Deborah Lupton (1999, 60) holds that ‘there is a strong element of eroticism inherent in the power offered by the car and drivers’ belief that they can take charge over this power and manipulate it for their own ends’. Here another aspect of driving transpires, namely the ability to control and manipulate the vehicle (Grundvall 2005). Driving skills are stressed to be crucial by drivers (Vaaranen 1999; Miller 2001) and signifies the potential dangers that can be unleashed unless a skilled driver masters and remains in control of the vehicle (Willis 1978; cf. Redshaw 2006; 2007; 2008). Redshaw (2008, 130) makes it evident how this construction of control is ‘often related to the glorified ability to control the car and less often to self-control’. The situations where driving skills are needed almost without exception, relate to excess speed(ing). Motor vehicles – most notably mopeds, cars and motorcycles – and speed(ing) are considered matrimonial.

11. A topic we will not address further here, but have elaborated on elsewhere, is the relation between the violence of motor vehicles (and the entire automobility regime, see Böhm et al. 2006, and Redshaw 2007) and the rhetoric of affirmative emotions – pleasure, enjoyment and desire (see Balkmar and Joelsson 2010).

Pleasures of speeding

Let us consider how the interviewee Stig reasons around the experiences of speed(ing). Stig is fifteen and lives in a large Swedish city where he goes to high school in a white middle-class neighbourhood. He drives a trimmed moped and elaborates on why he drives fast:

Tanja: do you like to drive fast then?

Stig: yes that's always fun

Tanja: how fast can yours go? because it's been tuned right?

Stig: yeah maybe it can get up to seventy but I am thinking of getting some more work done

Tanja: but if we go back to driving fast how do you feel or how would you describe the reason why driving fast is so much fun

Stig: yes it's really nice to just drive / I do not know

Tanja: do you think it's important that you're able to drive fast then?

Stig: I do not know it would only be a means of transport in that case / of course you want to move quickly but whether it's important I do not know / it wouldn't have been as important if my friends hadn't trimmed theirs or if my friends hadn't had mopeds

Tanja: why do you think that? it's perhaps a difficult question but why do you think so many people or many young people like driving fast?

Stig: it feels a bit dangerous / a bit dangerous a bit illegal¹²

For Stig, the moped is merely a means of transport if the social aspects of owning, riding and driving the vehicle are not considered. Driving fast must then be perceived and experienced in this social context, where speeding and 'the need for speed' is culturally salient. Driving fast evokes the fun of driving, its associated emotions making it 'really nice to just drive'. When asked about why Stig thinks so many like and enjoy driving fast, he brings forth the feelings of danger and illegality.

When it comes to the moped, a lot of young people see it as age dependent in the sense that it is only used for a short while. For most of the younger research subjects in Joelsson's material, this entails having a moped for a year (from age 15 to 16 in the inner city, a bit longer if they lived in/close to Samplinge or outside the inner city). In Samplinge, many of the young motor interested people drive mopeds before they are eligible and it is perceived to be a lot less 'fun' to become an eligible moped driver. After having the moped for about six months, many find the anticipation and excitement vanish and the vehicle turns into a means of transportation,

12. All of the following excerpts from interviews and field notes are translated by the authors.

attuning the interest towards cars and the driving license. The thrills and excitement are sought from doing something they are not allowed to. This is also something that Tor and Uno, 15-year-old moped drivers from the inner city school, agree with:

Tanja: do you like to drive fast then?

Tor: yes fast yes / oh yeah

Tanja: why is that

Uno: it feels great and you drive faster than you're allowed

Joel continues by adding that he thinks 'it's a bit dangerous when you ride in forty-five and then you get up to fifty-five, sixty-five, then you get speed blind, you get so damn happy that you're driving fast, then you don't think of much else'. He talks of becoming speed blind after (b)reaching certain speeds, which in turn enforces experiences of happiness, resulting in erasing everything else that is on his mind. Uno describes that driving fast feels great, since 'you drive faster than you're allowed'. When asked about the importance of speed in the next round of questions, they shift the perspective and discuss speeding from the point of view of the rational agent:

Uno: it might have been better if it went a bit faster from the start

Tanja: but would you say that it is important that you can drive fast with the moped?

Joel: no

Uno: no you hardly gain anything from doing it really / if you think about it

Tor: no

Joel: I must say that I use the brake in curves and things like that anyway / I mean if it's not like those very long curves and stuff so / I don't gain anything when I ride faster

At this point when the shift occurs (due to the introduction of the word 'important?'), the traces of a successful traffic safety training transpires. Uno starts by stating that he does not gain anything from driving fast, anchored by Joel who makes a point of braking in curves (at least long ones). When they reflect upon the positive effects of driving fast, it primarily concerns the emotional aspects: 'it feels great' and makes you 'damn happy'. If asked about the importance of driving fast (and reaching the affirmative emotional states), the discussion shifts to whether or not you can gain time by driving fast. The interviewees navigate seemingly contradictory discourses: one that emphasises speeding pleasures and another that emphasises traffic safety.

The traffic safety discourse becomes a reflexive tool they use to reflect upon their (dangerously) pleasurable road practices. In this vein they can construct themselves as rational agents who act in line with the traffic safety discourse – informed driver subjects that, after all, ‘speed safely’. This form of critical reflexivity needs to be related to the traffic safety discourse and the age specific and gendered subject positions it generates. A particular image arises in public discussions around traffic safety – the speeding young man (Best 2008; cf. Redshaw 2006). Despite critical research aiming at diversifying the picture of the young speeder, the image is affirmed and reinstated in public discourses on problematic drivers. The young man as a speeder is a prominent figure, promoted by the media and parts of the research community as solid evidence for the core, and hence cause, of traffic hazards. It is men as a group that is overrepresented in the statistics on injuries and fatal traffic accidents, but we argue that constructing a scapegoat does not deal with the societal dimension of the problem – namely the glorification of speed and speeding – which concerns the cultural conceptions of these matters.

To sum up, speed and speeding is framed as a fun activity, generating positive emotional reinforcement for the young men. Driving fast and speeding, give rise to feelings of happiness because both are illegal and perceived to be dangerous activities. The need to speed is in this sense built into the conception of the young driver (the practices are normalised and perceived as necessary and evident), thus making it crucial to stress the importance of driving skills instead of refraining from the dangerous practices. As Redshaw (2008) frames it, the control and mastering of the motor vehicle – not self-regulatory practice or self-control – is pertinent and vital. The driver subject engages in controlled, and thereby allegedly safe, speeding for pleasure. In order to elaborate this theme further we go online.

Speeding – connecting people

The Internet hosts numerous websites offering spaces to share memories and experiences of (dangerous) driving on public roads. Talk of (fun) speeding make up an important part of the community building and creation of group identities.¹³ We will present and discuss some of the stories that members of

13. This understanding of how culture works is in line with Benedict Anderson’s (1983/1991) famous understanding of the nation and the way it provides a collective sense of belonging as an ‘imagined community’. Anderson’s concept provided a macro-level analysis of the processes by which nationalism arose and spread in early modern Europe. Anderson’s account focused on the imagined quality of the nation, an emphasis that reflected his broader concern with the emergence of a new way of experiencing community, based upon indirect (rather than face-to face) social relationships (Anderson 1983/1991). Car enthusiasts meet both offline and online, and refer to themselves as a community or several communities. Car related communities continuously express, mirror and reinvent themselves in ways which act as points of reference for a shared production of collective identity and sense of community.

the Zatzy web community shared among themselves on the topic, ‘What is your best spontaneous street race?’¹⁴

We drove a kilometre or so before I decided to see if he really wanted to ‘race’, this is because he seemed keen and was mocking me a bit. I stepped on the gas and went for it. He didn’t want to be worse and did the same. He followed from 110 to 170, but after that he got so bashed he must have cried a river. By 230 km/h he was so far behind that he ended the race and I drove on home happy and satisfied. Poor guy didn’t know what he took part in. Hihi. (www.zatzy.com)

This excerpt pin points traditional aspects of how masculinity is constructed in relation to movement, space, presentation and domination (Connell 1983; Whitehead 2002). Speeding is presented as being about dominating other drivers and regulating the relations between men. The pleasures of speeding are thus related to competition, male rivalry and emotions of honour and humiliation. This kind of car duelling for kicks and respect points to how speeding is perceived as a social phenomenon; performed in relation to other drivers and audiences located inside or outside the car (including online audiences). Speeding encompasses emotions related to the honour of winning a race and the humiliation of losing, and they may also confirm the commitment to the ideals prevalent in a community of drivers ‘up for racing’. The shared interests in traditional masculine activities, such as competition, risk taking and measuring, are part of forming a homosocial arena between men (which to a large extent excludes women, see Balkmar 2008). Hence, speeding and racing on public roads can be understood as being about domination, hierarchy and escaping responsibility for the safety of other road users.

However, speeding is also about nurturing a shared interest in speeding. This writer expresses disappointment that he missed out on the opportunity of a post-race chat with his competitor: ‘I turned over at a parking lot by the road side but the guy in the Golf just went on =(’ (www.zatzy.com). Hence, what in traffic safety discourse is articulated as ‘reckless driving’, is in the online community’s talk of speed framed as friendly interaction between likeminded drivers. There is a particular way of addressing the act of initiating a race, namely to ask someone to ‘dance’. The positive connotations of social activities such as dancing and having a good time together, downplay the aggressive competitiveness implied in racing in favour of friendly socialising.

14. Zatzy racing community has 40 000 members and claims to be the biggest non-brand specific community in northern Europe (www.zatzy.com). The first comment was posted in 2003 and the last at the beginning of 2008. Translations by the authors.

Indeed, such re-framing of violent road practices turns dangerous driving into something rather normal and fairly safe, hence placing the near crashes and the ‘whoopses’, in the margins of the discourse of speeding. Negotiating risks as ‘innocent fun’ (Redshaw 2007, 138) or as a way of doing dangerous activities safely, are central to what constitutes speeding as a masculine and highly controlled endeavour:

I went on to about 240 km/h, but calmed down as the road was rather narrow and I wanted to get home alive. But, damn, it was fun...

(www.zatzy.com)

I drove fast, but of course not fast in an unnecessary and risky way. Just enough for it to be really good fun. (www.zatzy.com)

Dangerous driving entails emotions that are seemingly deterministic in relation to this driver’s actions. Controlling the car differs from self-control. To ‘calm down’ implies to come to one’s senses in the play between control and loss of control, exploring the boundaries of disorder and order (Miller 2005; Lyng 1990; 2005). Nevertheless, urging the thrills and being able to handle the risks involved form the emotional experiences of speeding. The readers of the stories in the Zatzy web community are assumed to know – having experienced it in the flesh – what it means to drive fast and dangerously.

Well, it is hard to picture these kinds of experiences in writing; they are to be experienced for real... (www.zatzy.com)

Knowing how it feels to speed is turned into a valuable resource to the community in the construction and reconstruction of a masculine identity – here, particularly linked to the performance of risk. The myths, ideologies and discourses of masculinity at play, afford the male subjects to emotionally invest in street racing and its live-life-to-the-max myth. The refusal to be restrained by regulations – whether it is traffic regulations or emotional limitations, fear of death or serious injury – positions the speeder as an expert who knows how to take part in dangerous activities, safely.

Judging from how speeding and competitions in cars on public roads are constructed by members of the Zatzy web community, the intense emotionality of speeding experiences forms a crucial part in the creation of a community. The need to speed is not refrained from, but turned into a skill to be mastered and controlled for the sake of fun. By implication, the narratives around speed(ing) implicate shared assumptions of how men are assumed to act, drive and feel. Hence, speeding for the sake of fun not only normalises violent road practices, but pastes a loosely formed community of speeders together.

Concluding remarks

In order to understand men's overrepresentation in traffic accidents, we have discussed how young male drivers emotionally and socially invest in speeding. The analysis suggests that the driver subjects navigate the dual dimensions of the power offered by motor vehicles – its pleasurable and its violent sides – in a way that constructs the subjects as 'fun seeking drivers' in control of what they are doing. Violent and violating effects of dangerous driving are placed in the margins of the speeding discourse, while emphasis on the intense emotions and embodied experiences is put forward by the subjects. However, in order not to reproduce the cultural scapegoat of the young speeder, we believe there is a need to contextualise the narratives and practices of the young men studied, within a much broader culture of speed.

The cultural and social conceptions of speed have several facets where speed is both addictive and prohibited. The ambivalence of speed can be analysed in relation to cultural and social conceptions (Redshaw 2007), as well as in relation to (vehicle) technology and design. Despite vehicle type, speed(ing) is latent in design and construction (Michael 2001) and the ability to control the vehicle becomes more important. (This pertains both to individual mastering and state control.) The potential speed(iness) coexists with the disciplining/controlling function of the state, ensuring that the potential speed is held under control. The research subjects are simply enjoying the ambivalence of speed inherent in a car centred culture: a culture where speed(ing) is glorified and valued, and linked to gendered conceptions of technology, design and vehicle use.

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From Work-Sharing Couples to Equal Parents – Changing Perspectives of Men and Gender Equality

Margunn Bjørnholt

Involving men in the care of children has become an important part of Norwegian, Nordic and, increasingly, international policies on gender equality. This article takes as its starting point the critique of the male breadwinner model in early Norwegian family research and the radical model of equal sharing of breadwinning and care that was suggested by the sociologist Erik Grønseth. These ideas were implemented in an experimental research project – the Work-Sharing Couples Project – in which both spouses worked part-time and shared housework, at a time when Norwegian family policies were in their formative years in the early 1970s. The article draws on a recent follow-up study of the project, and discusses current conceptualisations of men and gender equality as compared to the Work-Sharing Couples Project and its policy ambitions.

Despite its ambition to influence family policy, the Work-Sharing Couples Project did not succeed in this respect. Rather, as will be argued in this article, gender equality policies have shrunk from a broad focus on sharing equally both in the labour market and the family, to a narrow focus on the family and the sharing of a welfare benefit – paid parental leave during the child's first year.

In the time that has passed, major changes have taken place in family law; in the development of welfare benefits for parents; in parental practices; as well as in the theorisation and general views on parenthood, couple relationships and children. The Work-Sharing Couples Project was founded on a critique of the male breadwinner model and a vision of a symmetrical arrangement of paid work and care as the basis of equality between men and women. These ideas were formulated as a radical social critique of contemporary arrangements of work and care within early Norwegian family research from the 1950s onwards. Today, the 'double' gender equality project has become hegemonic in family policy. In this paper I reflect on this transformation from a radical critique into a model of state steering. How did the once radical ideas and visions fare in the process, and how did the current model of gender equality emerge?

There are obvious similarities as well as important differences between contemporary conceptualisations and policies and the model of gender

equality that the Work-Sharing Couples Project sought to promote. This example is therefore particularly useful in discussing how some ideas and policy ambitions succeed and some do not, based on the view that what does not become policy is just as important as what does. By retracing how the current gender equality model emerged and became hegemonic in policy making and what happened to a competing policy model, I hope to shed some critical light on the current gender equality project, employing Carol Bacchi's policy analysis (Bacchi 1999; 2009).

What was/is the problem represented to be? (WPR)

According to Carol Bacchi, all policy proposals imply specific problematisations which reflect subconscious cultural assumptions, and within which power structures may be lodged. In Bacchi's conceptualisation, 'problems' are created within the policy-making process. Problematisations constitute or give shape to 'problems', and particular representations of problems play a central role in how we are governed. Representations, the ways in which policy problems are represented in public policies, translate into real, lived experience. Bacchi's policy analysis – 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) – is a way of conducting a critical policy analysis. The WPR analysis takes a 'backward' approach, using concrete policy proposals to reveal what is represented to be the 'problems' within those proposals, with an explicitly normative agenda:

It presumes that some problem representations benefit the members of some groups at the expense of others. It also takes the side of those who are harmed. The goal is to intervene to challenge problem representations that have these deleterious effects [...] (Bacchi 2009:44).

Bacchi's (2009:2) analytical approach consists of six questions:

1. What's the 'problem' (e.g. problem gamblers, drug use/abuse, gender inequality, domestic violence, global warming, or child sexual abuse) represented to be in a specific policy?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?
3. How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?
4. What is left as unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?
6. How/where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?

In seeing ‘problems’ as being ‘produced’ in the process of policy making, and in seeing ‘problematizations’ as part of ruling, Bacchi is heavily indebted to and makes extensive use of Foucault. Foucault is attending to the history of knowledge production, which he has variously termed the ‘archaeology’ or ‘genealogy’ of knowledge production. His method is to look at the continuities and discontinuities between the knowledge systems which informed the thinking during certain periods of history, and the social context within which certain knowledge and practices emerged as permissible and desirable, or were changed. In his view, knowledge is inextricably connected to power and often referred to as power/knowledge.

Internationally, there is an increasing interest in studying processes of knowledge production and policy development as processes of *co-production* (Jasanoff 2004) or *co-construction* (Taylor 1995) in which boundary organisations such as governmental commissions and social movements, play a key role. In Scandinavia, researchers of the development of the welfare state increasingly acknowledge the role of the social sciences in the construction of the welfare state, and the development of family policies as a ‘result of the amalgamation of political ambitions, social reforms and policy proposals put forward by social scientists employed as experts in governmental commissions’ (Lundquist and Roman 2008, 219).

In this paper, the ‘problem’ is men and gender equality, and I will start with genealogy (Bacchi’s third question). How has the current conceptualisation of men and gender equality come about? In so doing, I will use the Work-Sharing Couples Project of the 1970s and the theories that informed it, as well as the political fate of those ideas, as my point of reference.

Having worked my way through history, trying to trace the co-production of knowledge and policies from early Norwegian family research towards the present, I will return to Bacchi’s remaining questions to compare previous and contemporary conceptualisations of men and gender equality.

Men and gender equality in early Norwegian family research

Erik Grønseth was among the first Norwegian family researchers to draw attention to the question of men and gender equality. Drawing on the feminist pioneer Margarete Bonnevie and Wilhelm Reich, Grønseth (1956; 1970) criticised the male breadwinner model for jeopardising personal development as well as love relations between men and women, for its alienating effects on men, and for strengthening patriarchal dominance in the family. He emphasised the need for women to be financially independent of their husbands; only when meeting as free and equal individuals would love relationships be free of dominance and repression, and men and women would be able to develop their full potential as human beings. He further

emphasised the need for men to participate more equally in the daily care of their families, which he saw as emotionally gratifying for men as well as important for children's development.

Orchestrating egalitarian patterns of breadwinning and care in the 1970s

The Work-Sharing Couples Project was the realisation of Erik Grønseth's ideas in an experimental research project designed to promote more egalitarian family relations by orchestrating the mutual sharing of paid and unpaid work between husbands and wives, through both spouses working part-time and sharing domestic work and childcare. The study was carried out 1971–1975¹ on the initiative of the Norwegian Family Council and its leader, Ola Rokkones, and led by Erik Grønseth² from the Department of Sociology at the University of Oslo. Thirty years later, the participating couples were interviewed in a follow-up study.³ The original project was an action research project and – as the title of the main report indicates⁴ – men (too) working part-time were the main tool of change.

In a follow-up study, carried out 2005–2009, I found that the men had played a key role in initiating and implementing the work-sharing arrangement (Bjørnholt 2009a; 2011). This led me to pursue the question of men and gender equality.

Theorising gender relations 1950–70

In Norway, the Institute for Social Research (ISF), established in 1950, played a pivotal role in the development of sociology as a discipline, as well as in establishment of social research as an important element in the socio-democratic development of the welfare state (Thue 1997; Slagstad 2009). The ISF provided a thriving environment for interdisciplinary social research in the 1950s and 1960s, including studies of socialisation, the family and gender relations. Research into family, socialisation and gender relations involved psychologists and social psychologists, as well as the sociologist Erik Grønseth.

1. The project was initiated in 1969, but due to low response on the first sampling strategy, in which low-skill share-jobs were provided by large enterprises, aimed at recruiting working-class participants, the project team had to change strategy and eventually recruited a predominantly middle-class sample, mainly through the media and snowballing techniques, and in this way gradually succeeded in recruiting participants from 1971 onwards (Grønseth 1975).

2. Erik Grønseth was very enthusiastic about the follow-up study. He provided the material from the original study, as well as actively aiding the new study – he traced and contacted the first half of the participants before he died in the autumn of 2005.

3. The follow-up study was funded by the Research Council of Norway, the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs and the Department of Sociology and Human Geography at the University of Oslo.

4. Grønseth, E. 1975. *Også mannen på deltid i arbeidslivet* (Also the man working part-time). (Own translation.)

Erik Grønseth formulated a theoretical critique of Parsons's sex-role theory and the functionalist understanding of the family in 1956. Grønseth was inspired by Wilhelm Reich (Sand 2006), as well as by the Norwegian feminist pioneer Margarete Bonnevie (1932), who more than two decades earlier had formulated many of the ideas that Grønseth adopted and developed further.

The male breadwinner in Bonnevie/Grønseth's conceptualisation made women dependent on men, financially and emotionally, and the male provider role represented a basis for male power that led to an authoritarian family form which was detrimental to love. Grønseth also claimed that men's human potential was impaired through the lack of participation in the daily lives of their families.

Brun-Gulbrandsen and two of Grønseth's colleagues from the ISF, the psychologist Per Olav Tiller and sociologist Harriet Holter, contributed to the groundbreaking Swedish-Norwegian book, *Kvinnors liv och arbete* (Women's lives and work), edited by Edmund Dahlström (1962). Along with Dahlström, both Brun-Gulbrandsen and Holter presented important theoretical contributions to what would become the radical Scandinavian version of sex-role theory (Ellingsæter 2000).

Holter was the greatest contributor, and in her theoretical chapter (Holter 1962), she discussed sex-roles as a social structure, including the individual and social mechanisms that make sex-roles part of the societal structure. She further discussed continuity and change, both in a cross-cultural and historical perspective, and thus contributed to an understanding of sex-roles as dynamic and changeable.

In his contribution, Brun-Gulbrandsen (1962) focused on the negative aspects of the male sex-role and pointed out how socialisation into the (normal) male sex-role enhanced anti-social behaviour and characteristics, and how the male sex-role put men at risk in terms of health, as well as delinquency. Tiller's research into the socialisation of boys in seamen's families, established the 'danger' of father absence, which has repeatedly re-emerged in Norwegian research and public opinion right up to the present day.

During the 1960s, (the Scandinavian version of) sex-role theory became the paradigmatic approach to studying gender relations in the Nordic countries. Towards the end of the decade, the use of sex-role theory culminated with Harriet Holter's dissertation, *Sex Roles and Social Structure*, published in 1970, shortly before this theoretical framework was abandoned to give way to second-wave feminist academic scholarship.

Theorising gender in the 1970s

During the first part of the 1970s, under the influence of second-wave feminism and Marxism, the emphasis shifted towards theories of conflict and power.

At the same time there was considerable continuity in empirical research on families, and family research very much remained an interdisciplinary venture between sociologists and psychologists. From 1969, Holter participated in a large family research project – a collaboration between the ISF and the Department of Psychology at the University of Oslo. The title of the book from this project, *The Family in Class Society* (Holter, Ve Henriksen, Gjertsen and Hjort 1975) is indicative of a new theoretical paradigm. Throughout the 1970s, there was a strengthened focus on women through the emerging women's studies which combined empirical study of women's lives and the development of theory on women's subjugation, male dominance, patriarchy and gender in capitalist society. The state of the field by the mid-1970s is well covered in the anthology *Kvinnekunnskap* (Women's knowledge/Knowledge of women), edited by Støren and Schou Wetlesen (1976). In this anthology, Holter's contribution was titled 'On the Subjugation of Women, the Subjugation of Men and Techniques of Dominance', which illustrates the turn towards questions of structure and power.

Family and gender equality policy

Policy development has relied on inter-relations between researchers and policymakers in the national as well as the Nordic context, with governmental commissions and social movements, as important boundary organisations. In 1964 the Norwegian Labour Party established a commission on women's role, led by the Prime Minister Einar Gerhardsen, and with participation from the Labour Union as well as experts such as Harriet Holter and Åse Gruda Skard. The commission presented a broad programme for men and women's equal rights to paid work and equal responsibility for family life. In 1968 the twelfth meeting of the Nordic Federation of Women's Rights Association in Reykjavik, agreed upon a resolution pointing out the concept of the male breadwinner as the most important impediment to women's equal participation in society, and which emphasised the need for a revised social legislation and tax reforms as steps towards gender equality in all Scandinavian countries (Schönberg 1969).

With the first White Paper on children and the family (St.meld 51, 1973-74), the dual breadwinner model was introduced as the aim of family policies, and the promotion of women's paid work was declared a political goal. Further, the public responsibility to provide care facilities for children was acknowledged. In the first place, the change was primarily ideological and women's labour market participation preceded by far the development of welfare state benefits (Leira 1992). A substantial expansion of parental leave was finally gradually implemented 1987–93, while the aim of providing day-care to all children was not reached until 2008.

The rise of the women-friendly welfare state

During the 1970s and 1980s, important political initiatives that were aimed at the promotion of gender equality, took place. The women's movement can be seen to have been institutionalised, and its claims were (to some extent) taken up by the political apparatus. Helga Hernes (1987) argued that the relations between women and the state in the Scandinavian countries, represented a unique situation for the promotion of women's interests, based on alliances between women of different political orientations, as well as between women and the state, i.e. the state could be an instrument in developing a woman-friendly welfare state.

The publication of a series of books, *Kvinnens levekår og livsløp* (Women's living conditions and life course), contributed to legitimate women's claims for woman-friendly reforms. Still progress in this direction was slow. When policies gradually were implemented, they were framed within a consensual view on gender relations based on an alliance between pragmatic political actors and empirical research that focused on the organisation of everyday life, and to a large extent bracketing the radical thinking and theorising of the 1970s. I would claim that in Norway, the conflict perspective on gender relations, which dominated theorising in the 1970s and early 1980s, never reached policy making.

The Norwegian Gender Equality Act, passed in 1978, as well as the concept of gender equality, clearly bears the imprint of their conceptualisation within the consensual framework and the gender-neutral terminology of sex-role theory. This indicates that policies in this period were perhaps not so much the result of a co-production, as of a 'cultural lag' – a concept coined by Ogburn (1922) to describe the tendency for several phenomena, such as laws and wages, to lag behind other aspects of social change. The Scandinavian welfare states are, however, also prominent examples of proactive law reforms that preceded rather than lagged behind public opinion, as illustrated by Nordic family law reforms at the beginning of the 20th century, which placed the Nordic countries half a century ahead of other European countries in strengthening women's family based rights and financial citizen rights (Melby, Pylkkänen, Rosenbeck and Carlsson Wetterberg 2006).

Policy ambitions and activities

The Work-Sharing Couples Project was launched with an explicit ambition to influence policies. Parallel to the experimental research project, a Law Committee was established in 1972 to analyse the need for reforms that would facilitate the general implementation of the work-sharing model. The Committee (Norges familieråd 1975) suggested reforms in several domains, such as tax reductions for employers of part-time workers in order to replace tax rules that privileged the male breadwinner model with rules that

stimulated a dual-earner model based on both partners working part-time. It proposed to strengthen the rights of part-time workers in several ways, such as protection from discrimination and increased rights to pensions. People with high and middle incomes were expected to bear the costs of their part-time work themselves, but the committee proposed compensation for low-income groups. The committee also proposed welfare benefits, such as two weeks' paternity leave. This had the twofold motivation of husbands providing support to their wives, and allowing men to become more involved in their families. The reform proposals were presented in two broad hearings/seminars, which included policymakers, the main employers and workers' organisations and other participants.

In addition to the Law Committee, a survey of working-hours preferences was conducted (Glefjell 1984), revealing that a large proportion of the population (45 %) supported a model that involved both parents working part-time, and only a tiny minority (1 %) supported the dual-earner model with both parents working full time. Glefjell (1984, 27) concluded that in view of the strong support for the work-sharing model, the main obstacle to its general implementation must be the lack of political will.

In spite of the project's success as a research intervention and its broad reformatory ambition, the Work-Sharing Couples Project did not have any direct effect on policies, although many of the proposed reforms were later 'reinvented' and implemented during the 1980s and 1990s.

Erik Grønseth – a pioneer and the odd man out

Despite his pioneering role in theorising gender relations, Grønseth was in many respects the odd man out among his contemporaries. In *The Family in Class Society*, Holter and Ve Henriksen (1975, 18) reflected on the fact that from the mid-1950s, Erik Grønseth was alone in providing a theoretical analysis of the relations between the male provider role, the authoritarian family and the oppression of women, and in suggesting reforms such as the equal sharing of paid and unpaid work, as well as a cash-for-care scheme. They asked why Grønseth's ideas were not accepted in political and administrative circles, and pointed to three possible explanations: firstly, the work-sharing model conflicted with the demands of working life; secondly, his suggestion of a compensation to carers (cash-for-care) was seen to perpetuate a traditional breadwinning arrangement; and finally, they concluded that Grønseth's strongly liberal views on sexuality and marriage may have played a role.⁵

5. Interestingly, Holter and Ve Henriksen (1975) made no mention of the Work-Sharing Couples Project in which Grønseth had finally had the opportunity to try out some of his ideas. This omission is interesting in view of the strong public and media interest in the Work-Sharing Couples Project at the time. Grønseth's views on sexuality and marriage were highly controversial in the 1960s, but today they are generally accepted.

In my view, there were probably other reasons, too, why the double part-time model was not adopted.

Why did the double full-time, rather than the double part-time model become hegemonic?

That the gender equality project did not succeed in changing the norm of full-time work for men, nor the relation between paid and unpaid work in terms of a general reduction of working hours, relies on the embeddedness of the socio-democratic project in growth logic, where the demands of production and the labour market prevailed (Slagstad 1998). As a consequence, questions of working hours, as well as pay, have been left largely to the parties in working life, a sphere in which women have been weakly represented and gender equality has to a large extent been subordinated to the right of independent negotiations. This may again be seen as part of a general tendency for gender equality to be subordinate to other policy aims (Skjeie and Teigen 2003).

Another point is the proximity to and collapse of gender equality policies into family policies. Hernes (1987) argued that women's status as clients and employees in the Scandinavian welfare states represented a particular ground for political consensus among women on issues of particular interest to women: above all on sexual politics and the organisation of everyday life. Women's demands from below and state feminist policies of integration from above, represented a potential for state feminist policies and woman-friendly welfare states in the Scandinavian countries. The role of women and women's organisations in the development of the welfare state has increasingly become acknowledged (Berven and Selle 2002). In retrospect, the state feminist project has above all led to reforms in the domains of sexual policy, family and children, while it has been less influential in the economical domain.

The question is whether this success in traditionally female domains also became a trap that limited and restricted the gender equality project to the family sphere. The confounding of gender equality policies and family policies may thus be one of the paradoxes of the woman-made and woman-friendly welfare state. The reduction of gender equality policies to family policies may also be understood in view of the lack of success in relation to the economy and the labour market, which may have led to a compensatory emphasis on the family as an accessible domain for political reforms.

How daddy policies became gender equality policies and vice versa

Today, equal parenthood, and father policies in particular, are important elements in gender equality policies. The origin of such policies is also to be found in early family research. In addition to Grønseth, the child psychologist

Åse Gruda Skard (1953) argued that men's participation in the everyday care of their children was necessary to bring gender equality forward. However, from having been an important part of early family research, the question of men and gender equality receded into the background in research and policy-making in the 1970s, with the exception that parental leave was made gender neutral in 1978. Nevertheless, fathers' rights have been an important but not fully recognised undercurrent in the processes of family law reforms from the mid-1970s, starting with the breakthrough of fathers' rights perspectives in the family law reform in 1981 (Gundersen 1984).

In 1988 the 'man question' re-emerged in public debate and policymaking with a governmental commission on the men's role (St.meld 4 1988/89, NOU 1991:3). One of its most important proposals was the paternal quota of parental leave, which was introduced in 1993. With the commission on the men's role as a boundary organisation, men's rights policies from below were supplemented by state masculinity policies from above. The commission on the men's role was criticised for its unclear position in relation to a 'rights' versus a 'care' perspective (Fosshaug 1991).

In the commission on the men's role, state feminist policy from above – aimed at getting men to take a greater responsibility in the family – is amalgamated with an organised fathers' rights struggle from below. In the further development of paternal policy, some of the ideas from early family research were recirculated, among them the 'dangers of father absence' and the 'need for male role models' (NOU 1993:12; NOU 1995:27), regardless of the fact that these ideas by then had been deemed scientifically obsolete for a long time (Tiller 1985; Bjørnholt 2009b).

Men and gender equality – what was/is the problem represented to be?

Having so far dealt in some detail with genealogy (Bacchi's third question) I will now turn to the 'problematizations' of men and gender equality in the Work-Sharing Couples Project as compared to today, employing a structured WPR-analysis. Bacchi's analytical framework may be used in different ways, either attending to all questions systematically or as part of an integrated analysis. In this paper I choose to let Bacchi's remaining questions structure the final analysis of the problematizations, hidden assumptions and implications of Grønseth's model of gender equality, as compared to the conceptualisation of men and gender equality underlying current policies. Although an integrated analysis may be more elegant, I find the systematic approach preferable in this case, as it provides a framework for a combined analysis and comparison of the two different policy approaches. I hope the reader will be patient with the overlaps and repetitions resulting from this strategy.

I will now compare Grønseth's ambitious dual-earner/dual carer model,

based on double part-time and parental shifts in the home, and the current policy of equal parenthood, i.e. the paternal quota of parental leave.

What was/is the ‘problem’ of men and gender equality represented to be? (Q1)

In Erik Grønseth’s conceptualisation, the ‘problem’ was represented to be unequal couple relationships and the detrimental effect of patriarchal power in the family on the heterosexual love relation. Men’s breadwinner role in a gender complementarian arrangement of paid work and care was seen as a source of male dominance and of inauthentic heterosexual love relations. Part of the ‘problem’ was also a threatening care crisis as a result of women entering the labour market, demanding an increase in men’s caring.

Grønseth’s model was based on a two-sphere way of thinking, in which the unpaid household work was seen as being of equal value in relation to paid work. The family as a unit was the main focus and the couple relation the main arena for change (Bjørnholt 2009a). The Work-Sharing Couples Project aimed at a reallocation of paid and unpaid work between men and women, rather than an increase in families’ total supply of paid labour at the cost of domestic work and family time.

The most important tool in Grønseth’s conceptualisation was the changing of men’s relations to work, in that men (too) were to work part-time and to share the unpaid work in the home, which comprised both childcare and domestic work. The project had a longitudinal perspective; the aim was a better balance of work and family, in which the perceived need for a caretaker at home was not restricted to the short period of infancy.

The present reservation of a non-transferable share of parental leave for fathers represents the ‘problem’ as unequal parenthood. Within this problematisation women’s larger share of parental leave is seen as part of the ‘problem’. The father-child relation and individual parenthood make up the main focus, and changing men’s relation to children is the main tool in transforming gender relations.

The current representation of men and gender equality is contradictory. Depending on the eye that sees, the mandatory sharing of parental leave represents fathers as equally responsible for child-care and as equally encumbered with caring responsibilities as mothers vis-à-vis employers. On the other hand, it also represents men as unwilling, irresponsible, weak, and not capable of prioritising care, but it also constructs men and fathers as particularly valuable carers, while mothers’ care is presented as part of the problem, which may lead to a ‘paradox of valuation’ (Bekkengen 2002). There is a conflation of the struggle for men’s rights and the struggle for gender equality. Arguments of redistribution – the need for men to share the burdens of parenthood – are intertwined or confounded with arguments of

recognition of men as equal parents and of fathers' rights to a more equal share of the pleasures of parenthood, including paid parental leave. This ambiguity makes it unclear whether men are to *contribute* to gender equality in the family or if men are to be *treated more equally* as parents.

What presuppositions or assumptions underlie the representation of the 'problem'? (Q2)

Presuppositions or assumptions refer to background knowledge that is taken for granted and that lodges within problem representations. This question employs Foucault's archaeological method to uncover the (assumed) thought behind specific problem representations. It is not about why something happens but what could be thought, what it is possible to think, at the level of basic and fundamental world views. At this stage of the analysis, Bacchi suggests to focus on binaries, key concepts and categories.

In Grønseth's model, the most important binaries are male domination and female subordination, or life-enhancing versus oppressive families and societies. The key concept is *liberation*. Grønseth's representation relies on the categories men and women; for Grønseth, changing the heterosexual relationship is the main concern, and the couple relationship is the locus of change.

In current representations, the main binary is that between modern versus traditional couples. The father-child dyad is seen as the key element of the modern imagery, while the mother-child dyad is coded as traditional. The key concept is *gender equality/equal parenthood*. The key categories in this representation are *fathers* and *mothers*, and the reallocation of parental involvement rests on a hydraulic model of gender equality, assuming that if women retrench their parenting, men will automatically fill in.

The implied problem in current representations of the 'problem' may both be men being denied equal participation, and men's lack of will, as the paternal quota is sometimes referred to as 'the mild force of the state'. Another implied problem is lacking recognition of men as fathers, as well as the unjust distribution of a welfare state benefit (paid parental leave), and of women and or employers not allowing for men to care.

In Grønseth's representation it is men's responsibility to change, while women and children are the implied victims of male domination, although Grønseth also thought that men too, were the victims of the male breadwinner arrangement, and that men, too, stood to gain from gender equality. In relying on a reallocation, rather than an expansion of the total amount of parent's paid work, this model implicitly values the family sphere and personal life equally as high or higher than paid work.

The paternal quota of parental leave is based on the implicit assumption of double full-time and the institutionalisation of child-care from the age

of one. The model also implicitly subordinates love, care, the family sphere and personal life to paid work, as the right to paid parental leave, including the paternal quota, is derived from labour market participation. Paid parental leave is a substitute for income, rather than a means of securing infants the right to be cared for by parents and parents the right to care.

Although men's lack of will is implied in the 'mild force' of the paternal quota, men are represented in discourse as basically willing to share care equally, but being kept out by women or employers, therefore needing a little help from the state. Women (and employers) are to blame for unequal parenthood, and women's larger share of parental leave is seen as the result of female power. Society, women and employers are responsible for giving men access to their rights as equal parents.

What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? (Q4)

At this stage, Bacchi suggests focusing on the distortions and misrepresentations that emerge from the way the 'problem' is represented, its assumptions and the way it has been shaped. Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?

Grønseth problematised the male full-time worker norm and men's own responsibility to shape egalitarian families – issues that have been silenced today. He also problematised institutional care and emphasised children's need to be cared for in the home. On the other hand, both in Grønseth's as well as the contemporary representation of the 'problem', occupational symmetry and the harmonisation of men's and women's life courses are the implicit prerequisite for egalitarian relationships. Grønseth did not problematise class, nor is class part of contemporary problematisations, and the middle-class bias of this model of gender symmetry remains unproblematised.

Stefansen and Farstad (2010) found that the model of parenting and family life promoted in policies, is modelled on middle-class parenting practices and middle-class family ideals. The middle-class family ideal is based on individual and serial parenting of a presumed robust child in need of new challenges from an early age. This model conflicts with a working-class model of what constitutes a good family life and working-class parents' perceptions of children's needs. In contrast to the middle-class model, working-class parents tend to see parenting more as a common family responsibility, and emphasise the mother-child bond, small children's vulnerability and their need to be cared for at home and postpone daycare. Similarly, postcolonial critiques draw attention to how the Scandinavian model of gender equality becomes part of discourses that produce inequality and of paternalising civilising strategies towards those constructed as 'the others' (Larsen 2009; Vouri 2009).

The strong focus today on gender equality as a family issue, silences the impact of the labour market and of other factors outside the family in the causation of gender inequity, and the strong focus on family policies silences other policy options. Working life and the male norm of full-time work have remained largely unchallenged, and the idea that men, too, should reduce the time spent on paid work to make room for family, let alone to promote their partner's career, is not part of current discussions of gender equality. In the current conceptualisation of sharing equally, Grønseth's vision of a society in which paid and unpaid work were to be equally shared and equally valued by men and women, and by society, has shrunk into a narrow focus on the sharing of parental leave during children's first year.

In the current representation, the causal relation between equal parenthood and egalitarian couple relationships is taken for granted, but left unproblematised. It is taken for granted that the paternal quota will lead to gender equality, in the family as well as in the labour market, although its effects are far from documented. A recent and extensive longitudinal study (Cools et al. 2010) found an adverse effect on women's labour market participation and wages.

Children are represented as items that should and can be shared equally between the parents during their first year, and be enrolled in day-care from the age of one. Possible differences between fathers' and mothers' needs, as well as possible differences in parenting practices related to gender/class/ethnicity are left unproblematised. The desirability and quality of institutional care for all children is not problematised, nor are children's vulnerability and possible differences in children's needs. One (middle-class/ethnic Norwegian) model of gender symmetry is seen as superior, compared with other family models, along the 'modern-traditional' binary. Other means of obtaining gender justice, like redistribution, are silenced, as are the persistently low valuation of care and the resulting different economic valuation of male and female life-courses.

What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'? (Q5)

This question starts with the presumption that some problem representations create difficulties for some groups, and that problematisations need to be interrogated in order to 'see where and how they function to benefit some and harm others, and what can be done about this' (Bacchi 2009:15). Three interconnected effects are pointed out: discursive effects, subjectification effects and lived effects.

In Grønseth's representation, the discursive effects were to change the idea of the benefits of the gender complementary arrangement of work and care. Further, men were constituted in discourse as responsible for changing

their working hours in order to change their relation to their wives, and men and women were constituted as equally responsible for paid work and care. The follow-up study of the Work-Sharing Couples Project found that the men acted from a subject position of egalitarian-minded, ‘modern’ and caring men who, to a large extent, had their wives’ career and personal development in mind (Bjørnholt 2011). The lived effects for the participants in the Work-Sharing Couples Project were predominantly beneficial (Bjørnholt 2009a; 2010b), but as I have pointed out above, this model of gender equality has a middle-class bias and may be problematic as a general policy model.

The discursive effect of the non-transferable paternal quota is a more individualised and competitive parenthood, as fathers are positioned in discourse as equally good parents and as right-holders, in addition to being agents of change. Mothers are positioned as gate-keepers and obstacles to change. Mothers’ greater family responsibility is being left unrecognised and they are being blamed for their more extensive adaptation to care, which is seen as an individual choice. Policies based on an ‘imagined equality’ (Lewis 2003), which does not reflect men’s and women’s different adaptations to work and care, may have negative effects on women’s self-esteem as well as negative redistributive effects for women over the life course, and in case of divorce.

The middle-class and ethnocentric bias of the underlying model of gender equality, based on the harmonisation of men’s and women’s life courses (Q 4) is potentially harmful and discriminatory to the working-class and ethnical minorities.

How/where has this representation of the ‘problem’ been produced, disseminated and defended? (Q6)

This question links to question number three (genealogy), in drawing attention to ‘the practices and processes that allow certain problem representations to dominate’ (Bacchi 2009, 19), and aims at pointing out how they can be questioned, disrupted and replaced. The work-sharing couples model of double part-time, combined with shift-parenting, represented a heretic and oppositional vision in the 1970s. Grønseth was controversial. His partner in the project, Ola Rokkones, and the organisation he established and headed, the Norwegian Family Council, was an independent social entrepreneur who was clearly not part of the political establishment. It was closed after losing their state funding in 1979 (Vollset 2011).

The current representation of the ‘problem’ of men and gender equality, relies on the partly institutionalised co-production by researchers and policymakers from above, as well as the initiative of social movements and pressure groups – the women’s movement and organised men’s rights interests – from below. Media has also played an important role in the

dissemination of the contemporary representation of the ‘problem’ as one of unequal parenthood, women’s gate-keeping, lacking recognition of men as parents and men who lack rights.

Conclusion

This article took as its starting point the radical model of equal sharing of breadwinning and care that was suggested by the sociologist Erik Grønseth. These ideas were implemented in an experimental research project in the 1970s – at a time when Norwegian family policies were in their formative years – in which both spouses worked part-time and shared housework. Despite its ambition to influence family policy, the work-sharing model did not influence policies. Neither the sharing of paid work, nor the reduction of working hours, became important issues in Norwegian gender equality policies. Rather, gender equality policies have shrunk from a broad focus on sharing equally in the labour market and the family, to a narrow focus on the sharing of parental leave. This article traces the emergence of the current policies for equal parenthood, as compared to the vision of egalitarian couples as represented by the work-sharing model.

Having outlined its historical and class-based contingency, as well as some of the implicit assumptions, silences and negative implications of the current model of equal parenting, in comparison with Grønseth’s work-sharing model, and the middle-class bias of both models, I hope to raise awareness of the historical and social contingency, blind spots and unintended effects of current problematisations and policies of men, family and gender equality.

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Part II. Work and organisation

Gender and the Division of Labour in a Swedish Context

Line Holth, Birgitta Jordansson and Lena Gonäs

This article¹ aims to lucidly illustrate and discuss the gender division of labour, gender segregation and the strive for gender equality in Swedish working life today. The starting point is that the understanding of labour and the conditions of working life historically rest on a gender blind perception of the actual work, and that this has led to consequences for the situation that we are in today. By ‘filling’ the concept of labour with both women and men, we want to open up for a problematisation. The perception of labour also has implications for the way that gender equality is being discussed, something which this problematisation leaves room to comment on.

We can distinguish a tenacious continuity when it comes to the division of labour and segregation, which has been – and still is – of pivotal importance to women’s subordination in working life. We search for the roots of this in the rising industrial society and move the questions ahead to the development of the last decades, which provide us with a time axis that captures both change and continuity.

Historically, women and men have carried out different types of work, but with a number of variations depending on time, place, age, class and civil status. Work tasks and the area of work have been defined based on presumed suitability, founded on notions of gender. A way of thinking which focused on distinctive characteristics and was based on the difference between the sexes, gained ground in the modernisation process that was initiated with the rise of the industrial society in the latter part of the 19th century. Since then, this has functioned as a given basis for the perception of women and men. At the outset, it was taken as a given that men would take responsibility for the financial maintenance of the family, while the women’s responsibility would concern home and family matters. During the last decades, active gender equality work and national gender equality politics have contributed to the start off of a process of change. Focus has been on the equal right to work and private life for all people. Nowadays, women’s participation in the labour market is close to the same level as men’s, and men’s increased involvement within the family, in addition to the new father role which is spreading more and more – at least among the middle class in cities – mean that the image can and should be problematised. However, despite political intentions of gender equality, the gender division of labour is sustained,

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where the main responsibility for home and family matters still rests with women and where working life is characterised by a division where women and men are placed within different gender-coded sectors, professions and work tasks. Men as ‘creatures of society’ and women as ‘creatures of care’ have a continuity which seems hard to break. When we, with regard to time, approach the late 20th century and the start of the 21st century, it normally leads to discussions on how women and men succeed in combining work and family life. For women it is to a great extent about adjusting to a labour market and a working life which have been shaped by male prerequisites, and men should, in a corresponding way, ‘take their place’ in the home and the family.

We have chosen to shed light on the empirical themes of the article through three theoretical perspectives: Yvonne Hirdman’s gender system, Charles Tilly’s theory on categorical inequality, and Anna Jonasdottir’s theory on love power. What these theoretical perspectives have in common, is that they explain the constantly recreating inequality between women and men from different starting points and at different levels. By using the gender system, Hirdman captures the power relation’s construction of gender. Tilly clarifies how the institutionalisation of categories and structures takes place, and thus, how the gender system is sustained. Through the theory of love power, Jonasdottir focuses to a greater extent on the background of power construction and the preservation of historical processes.

Theoretical perspectives to illustrate the divided working life

Yvonne Hirdman (2001) describes the gender system as an order structure of gender, which is founded on and sustained by two principles. The first principle is dichotomy, meaning a separation of women and men as gender categories and which should not be merged. It is a logic which presents itself when it comes to the division of labour and the characteristics and notions of the male and the female. The second principle is hierarchy, which is ordered in accordance with men being used as the norm and superior to women, where the female has a lower value than the male. The labour market is heavily influenced by this, which transpires most clearly in the wage differences between women and men. This oppositional relation, or separation, not only involves individuals’ characters or identities, but also institutions and historical processes. The gender system as a concept is useful in this context as it clearly points to patterns in the gender division of labour and gender segregation. The gender system as an idea has within the feminist knowledge project also been met with some critique, e.g. that the concept can be seen as static, where the hierarchy between the sexes is intrinsic and thus, provides little room for variation or for describing equality between

the sexes – neither historically nor between cultures (Gemzöe 2010). De los Reyes (2005) has criticised the gender system, as different living conditions cannot just be explained by unequal gender relations. She states that it would be possible to dissolve the borders between the categories of gender, class and ethnicity through intersectional analysis in order to see how they construct each other in various contexts, instead of reducing power relations to a structure and a set of relations.

Charles Tilly's (2000) analyses and conceptual orientation include a number of different social organisations, where gender is a category which enforces the unequal relations. He describes different categories as essentially exchangeable, and that inequality, despite its fixity, is changeable in its concrete form, but that inequality between the sexes seems to be the most fundamental form of inequality. He explains the hierarchical order between women and men with the concept of 'categorical inequality', i.e. the category *man* is superior to the category *woman*, and that the condition for them to remain constant is simply that they are ordered in a hierarchy and that they 'to a large extent are built on an institutionalisation' (2000, 19). Long-term and systematic imbalances in terms of life chances, create more or less stable differences which are institutionalised. Thus, the categorical inequality assists exploitation. Subsequently, those with access to value-creating resources – which, besides money, could be status, respect or protection – do what they can to exploit or keep control over the possibilities that these resources bring. Subordinated groups will to a great extent adjust to the existing conditions. Through assimilation, this adjustment also contributes to a generalisation of the systematic imbalance. The consequences of an adjustment to a gender blind perspective on labour, and the social acceptance that this has been given in working life and in the relation between working life and life outside of it, can be captured through Tilly's concept apparatus.

Exploitation in working life is traditionally linked to economic exploitation and to the relation between labour and capital in Marxist terminology, where the power relation means that the worker, by definition, is subordinate to the capital owner. Through the love power theory, Jonasdottir (2003) captures the foundation of women's subordinated position in a similar way, based on gender relations. The love power theory finds its starting point in gender and power, but instead of referring to labour and socioeconomic structures, Jonasdottir talks of socio-sexual structures, where the love power as a concept wants to capture both 'care' and 'love'. Men's exploitation of women is linked to the concept of love in a way which ties in with the Marxist terminology, where love becomes equivalent to labour. Women give and men receive love and care, which give rise to a power relation that explains women's subordination and men's superiority in society, despite

the fact that women today are relatively independent of men and state, as we are living in an officially equal society. In practice, this means that men are authorised with interpretation priority and women affirm the men. This process drains women on energy, while men gets an addition of energy, which in turn conditions their possibilities in society, and thus constitute processes which reproduce the historical male-governed society.

These concept apparatuses all start out from a socio-constructivist perception of gender, where femininities and masculinities are constructed as each other's opposites and which operate mutually excluding in relation to each other. Through this gender-characterised dichotomy, men are associated with, for example, technical professions and an enthusiasm for machinery, where technical competence is a part of masculinity and what it means to be a man. Women on the other hand, are for example associated with care professions, based on a rationality focused on care, needs and relations, where caring is part of being a woman. This can be seen as a version of the cultural distinction between female sensitivity and male instrumentality, and which through the construction as an oppositional pair, at the same time provide a dualistic image of women as technically incompetent and men as lacking in human interest. Even though gender stereotypes have hardly no importance to the way that people actually are, they still have great social meaning as women and men try to live up to social expectations and also expect others to do the same, and thus, a reproduction of gender takes place (Ahl 2008). The division of labour between the sexes can be seen as a social institution which supports the dualism of gender constructions, and the gender segregation of working life is an expression of this structuring principle (Gemzöe 2010). That women and men still choose 'gender-marked' educations and professions, and that the choices are legitimised through the fact that they are tied to characteristics, can metaphorically be expressed as an ongoing 'nurture of gender' (cf. Jordansson 1998).

Work and family in the rise of modern society – a historical retrospect

Society was for a long time built around a male one-provider model. Against the backdrop of notions of different gender-determined areas of responsibility – constructed as each other's opposites (Ahl 2008) – it was considered natural that he provided for the family economically, while she took responsibility for home and family matters. A family-provider principle was developed and gained wide support, both politically and within the unions (Hirdman 1998). In spite of this, a lot of women were working during this period, but it is difficult to get facts about the numbers since a great deal of women's work was invisible in terms of statistics. It was, not to say the least, about an unregulated labour market, or so-called housework, where for

example sewing made up a great part of the women's labour market. Other areas of work that are hard to measure, are for example laundry, ironing and cooking in middle-class homes, which were also work tasks carried out without a contract of employment. However, women could also be found in the regulated labour market – in industries, trading and offices. The one-provider model was thus to a great extent about ideals rather than reality, but yet an important starting point in the context of this article since it created norms and conditioned women's position in working life.

Women were part working life, based on a kind of special condition – in 'wait for marriage' or due to financial necessity. A telling example of this is that a factory-working man was defined as a worker regardless of age, while a factory-working woman, still after many years in the profession, could be referred to as a 'factory girl' (Norlander 2000). In other words, men were considered to be the primary workforce and constituted the norm for the working conditions, while women were seen as a 'subspecies' in working life. It is important to emphasise that it was notions of the ideal which created the framework for concrete conditions, and a goal to strive towards. It is against this backdrop that the – by Hirdman (2001) coined – order structure of gender is built and which created norms for the rise of the industrial society.

The unions' actions in relation to men and women in the labour market shed more light on this approach. There were unions, like *Skrädderiarbetarförbundet* (the tailoring workers' union), which by the end of the 19th century excluded female members, and where one of the reasons given was gender (Schmitz 1982). *Nattarbetsförbundet* (the night workers' union), which was introduced in Sweden in 1909, is another example of how the work of unions held different meanings to women and men. In line with early rules on the protection of workers, a regulation was implemented which meant that women in industries would not be allowed to work night shifts (Karlsson and Wikander 1986). Another example was the difference in wages, with the purpose of establishing the family-provider principle, which meant that the man's wage would provide for the whole family. Indeed, the *Swedish Trade Union Confederation* (LO) had approved a principle decision already in 1909 about equal pay for women and men working in industries, but reality told a different story. In general, women earned half, or up to two thirds, of what their male co-workers did.

Alongside of this, a special 'female labour market' developed. It was sometimes described as necessary for those who had 'drawn a blank in the marriage lottery', as expressed in 1859 in *Tidskrift för hemmet* (Magazine for the home). Increasing problems to support oneself and one's family within the middle-class groups is one explanation to why new areas of work opened up. The number of unmarried women rose significantly and was at

its peak during this period. It also caused great financial support problems internationally, as these women were still provided for by their fathers or other male relatives.

In addition to a lot of women's work tasks being considered to lie within specific female areas of competence, it was combined with a need for labour within new or changeable work areas. The law on elementary schooling with demands on education for all children, and the emergence of nursing as a profession, are examples of the call for an educated workforce within professions that easily could be categorised as so-called female areas of competence. This made it possible for an argumentation that women could work, without breaking against the notions of womanhood, as the work tasks were within the caring and nurturing areas that women traditionally had dedicated themselves to. This specifically female labour market can also be seen from a class perspective, since it was women with a certain education who were able to contribute to the professionalization of these professions (Florin 1987; Emanuelsson 1990).

A horizontal gender division of labour was evident through the specific female labour market that developed. However, this division also existed in the field of industry, where men were greatly dominant within the so-called heavy industry, while the women workers were found in the light industry, e.g. the textile, clothing and food industry, which was also built on notions of male strength and female weakness. It is, however, a myth that the division of labour between women and men saved women from doing heavy work. Throughout history, women have always had heavy jobs – at home, in nursing, farming, as well as in the field of industry.

The vertical gender division of labour was even more apparent, with regulations within various areas which meant that men had exclusive access to areas of work that demanded an educational degree, and that qualified vocational education was closed to women. A young woman applied to the *Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm* in 1892, but the application was rejected with the motivation that the education was for 'young men', and it was not until 1921 that women received formal access. In certain educational programmes in higher education, e.g. engineering programmes, there have been very few female students even in more recent days. Not until the 1970s did the number of women in these educational programmes exceed ten per cent and even today, some engineering programmes still have very few women enrolled (Berner 2003), which shows the constant reproduction of gender stereotypical expectations (Ahl 2008) and the toughness of the gender constructions.

There were also obstacles which limited the professional practice of those women who actually did receive education at the start of the 20th century.

Not until *behörighetslagen* (the law of competence) was established in 1932 did women receive the right to apply for higher public and governmental posts. However, it took time before the law was completely put into practice. The prohibition of women priests remained until 1958 and bishops could refuse to ordain women even in the early 1980s. In 1980, a change was initiated which meant that military posts were also made available to women.

Women and men in the labour market during the latter part of the 20th century and early 21st century

The development of the welfare state during the post-war era has gone hand in hand with the increase of women doing paid work. From not having had a solid anchoring in the labour market, women today make up roughly half of the workforce (SCB 2010a). A contributing reason for this quantitative equality has been the development of the welfare state – the political demands of an improved standard of living and a democratised educational system. In addition to this, shortages in the workforce led to women being used as a reserve workforce. For example, this applied to those women who had been recruited to the engineering profession in the 70s, when there was a shortage of technicians and engineers in the Swedish industry (Bernier 2003).

When it comes to the expansion of the public sector during the post-war era, married women became the quick reserve, and the idea was that they would be able to enter the labour market without any greater educational effort (Hirdman 1998). In practice, there were two different types of women who contributed to the rapid increase of women doing paid work from the 1960s onwards. The unmarried women, who received new and more opportunities to work, and the married women, who were now encouraged to work part-time alongside of their responsibility for the home.

The male one-provider principle of the early 20th century was now being replaced by notions that women should contribute as a breadwinner. A new concept was introduced in the 1960s and people spoke of the double-working housewife. Already in the 1970s, the rhetoric and practice had changed, and the two-provider principle became an established concept. It is also now that gender equality expands as a political field. To a start, with focus on women's right to work, but also with demands on men to take responsibility in the home and for the family. This does not mean that the gender division of work in the labour market disappears, rather it is reinforced, which was especially due to the fact that women's increased participation in the workforce to a great extent meant that the unpaid work which had been placed within the family was transferred into the public sector as paid work.

At this point, women in the labour market were made up of those who after a break in the sphere of paid work, re-entered working life, and those who essentially never left the labour market when they started a family and had children. Instead, Swedish women have worked less hours after returning from maternity leave, which is one of reasons why working hours differ between women and men. Another reason is that women to a great extent are offered part-time work within certain women-dominated sectors and areas of work, e.g. nursing and retailing. Despite the change which has been so important during the 20th century, there is a continuity and a toughness in the changeability. Notions of who ought to have the main responsibility for the family have remained the same, and women and men are still to a great extent working within different sectors and areas of work, which can still be explained by Hirdman's (2001) principles on separation and hierarchy. Today, close to 25 per cent of all working women are to be found within professions where 90 to 100 per cent of the employees are women (SCB 2010a). The equivalent proportion for men within the most male-dominated professions is 30 per cent. Sweden continues to have a divided labour market, where the division of women and men in business branches and sectors shows that around 80 per cent of all women are employed within public or private service sectors. The equivalent proportion for men is 43 per cent. It is these relations which are the reason why Sweden in international contexts can be portrayed as one of the world's most gender-egalitarian countries on the one hand, but as having a strongly gender-segregated labour market on the other (Gonäs and Karlsson 2005).

The patterns of segregation have, of course, transformed themselves in line with the changing structure of the labour market and the shifting workforce demand. New professions have been added and old ones have disappeared, at the same time as there has been a shift in the gendered composition of different professions. Several professions which demand academic education now have a more even distribution according to gender (Löfström 2009). During the last two decades we can see two seemingly contradicting tendencies when it comes to women's positions in working life in Sweden. After the deep economic crisis at the start of the 1990s and the sinking employment levels for women and men, the gap between these have remained and in actual fact deepened. Women's employment level is still in year 2010 not at the same level as it was at the start of the 1990s. The unemployment level for both women and men have stabilised itself around seven per cent during the last decade, which is high for Sweden in a historical perspective (SCB 2010b).

At the same time, Sweden belongs to the countries which have gone through the most rapid desegregation during the period 1997–2007

(measured according to Index of Dissimilarity, DI). This is explained both through a structural effect and an effect of the distribution of professions. The structural effect seems to be most powerful in the short-term, as it is about what work opportunities that are available at each time, while the more long-term shifts take place through the changes in the gender-related composition of the professional structure (Bettio and Verashchagina 2009). The Scandinavian countries have gone through similar changes, which are not just do to the growth of the service sector, but also to the fact that women gradually enter areas of work which previously have been closed or heavily male-dominated. In total, however, and seen in a longer perspective, a high segregation level still remains.

Today, both women and men are expected to work full-time after getting their education, for 40 years of their lifetime, which have come to be the norm for both women and men doing paid work (Emerek and Holt 2008). Yet, reality shows that this norm still only applies to men. In the Nordic welfare states, women's employment pattern can today be characterised as an extraction of working hours, adjusted to the lifecycle and placed within the framework of lifelong participation in the labour market (Rubery, Smith and Fagan 1999; European Commission 2009).

In the feministic discussion on structural change and women's wage employment in the 1960s, there were three hypotheses regarding women's future wage employment: women as a buffer or workforce reserve; women as substitute for men through lower wages; and finally, in accordance with the segregation hypothesis, women as an ideal workforce within certain specific sectors and professions (Humpheries 1988; Rubery 1988; Forsberg 1989). For example, Gunilla Fürst (1988) described the development in terms of 'from reserve to reservation', with direct reference to the engineering industry. Gunnel Forsberg (1989) used the concepts in a study of the development for women within the food industry in Sweden, and Lena Gonäs (1989) pointed to the way that women within the telecommunication industry came to function as a buffer during the 1970s and 1980s, in wait for the new technology in the production process. The development up till now shows that the reserve or buffer hypothesis is less applicable today as a basis of explanation in an analysis of women's position in the labour market. There is a stability in women's participation in the workforce over time which contradicts the reserve thought. That women were to be a substitute for men as a workforce because they have lower wages, is not as evident either. The principle of equal pay, the legislation on wage charts and the inspection of partial wage differences mean that the wage differences are not that direct. Rather, the differences are in general structurally conditioned and dependent on the level of education, given sector and position, as a result of long-

term and systematic imbalances between women and men's opportunities in life (cf. Tilly 2000). Today, a conclusion regarding the three hypotheses seems to be that it is the third hypothesis, the segregation hypothesis, which best describes women's position after a number of transformational periods. It looks like the segregation has guaranteed a certain employment-related security, yet it is at the prices of working in low-wage sectors, often with bad working conditions and a more trying workload in total (see e.g. Rubery, Smith and Fagan 1999; Härenstam and Beijerot 2001; Hammarström and Hensing 2008).

Even though we can see that women's role as workers seems to be well-established in the Swedish labour market, gender segregation and the gender-marked work tasks and professions (Westberg-Wohlgemuth 1996) still mean that subordination and exploitation exist. This constancy can be explained by Tilly's (2000) thoughts on the male superiority as institutionalised. We see a doubleness for women today in their roles in the workforce – on the one hand they have access to the labour market and the arrangement of the welfare state to fill the role as a wage earner and family provider, and on the other hand they have limited access to the good and well-paid jobs. Crompton, Lewis and Lyonette (2007) point to the fact that differences in institutional relations are of importance to women and men's working life and family life, and to the degree of exploitation. The 'sliding gender division of labour' at the workplace level is a concept which Ruth Emerek and Helle Holt (2008) use to describe the collective processes that recreate the gender division. The concept mirrors the processes that lead to women gradually slipping behind, despite the fact that they have the same education as men and start at a workplace with the same work tasks as men. It is not one, but several interacting processes which provide this result (report from *Nordiska BRYT-projektet* [the Nordic BRYT project], in Ahlgreen 1989). Another is the organisational structure and the differing opportunities that are available to women and men to reach interesting and prestigious jobs (cf. Bergman 2004). The workplace culture is of importance. Both the actual fact that women make use of the parental insurance, but also explicit expectations that they will do so in the future as well, to a greater extent than men. This can lead to women not being offered developing work tasks (Emerek and Holt 2008; Hochschild 1997). The expectations that younger generations will uphold the behaviour of previous generations lie here like a preserved mechanism which contributes to the existing segregation patterns and the reproduction of the same.

Different rounds of structural change have shown how those with the shortest period of employment and the most uncertain contracts, have lost their place in the labour market for long periods of time (Gonäs, Hallsten

and Spånt 2006), which happens to women to a greater extent than men. Women from all social classes are exposed to exploitation. For the working-class women it is about being ranked in a working life which demands that they accept a position at the bottom of the hierarchy. Thus, they are exposed to a double exploitation – both through their social class and their gender (Hartmann 1976). For the well-educated women it is matter of being ranked in a gender order which continues to base itself on unequal terms and conditions (Hirdman 2001), where the rules of the male career logic are to be followed, at the same time as the responsibility for the family still to a great extent rests with them.

Welfare state and gender equality politics – conditions for a sustainable work-life balance

Politics on family and gender equality, along with renewals of relations in the labour market, went from having a peripheral to a prominent role in the modernisation of Sweden during the 20th century (Lundqvist 2007). During the last 40 years, the welfare system has gone through great political changes in order to increase equality between the sexes. Equal terms, possibilities and conditions for both women and men to have a developing and stimulating working life, but also equal rights to both working life and family life, have been important starting points for gender equality politics and legislation on anti-discrimination.

The Norwegian political scientist Helga Hernes (1987), coined the concept of state feminism, which held that feminist and gender political interests have been institutionalised, which became apparent during women's political protest and mobilisation in the 70s. State feminism can be seen as an umbrella term for political actions that have integrated women into the labour market and government institutions, but also as a result of new relations between women and the state (Skjeie and Teigen 2003). In this context, state feminism illustrates the construction of the welfare state and the welfare development of the state, which took off after the Second World War (cf. Bergquist 1994:156f; Blom 1998:39; Siim 1990:16), where the concept receives its double meaning of political strategy and political result. Even though state feminism was seen as a mobilisation from 'below', i.e. as an interaction between women's mobilisation and campaigning, it has often been practiced from a perspective from 'above', i.e. from networks at the elite levels of society, through the state and party politics. The socio-democratic tradition of governing, with an ideology characterised by a gender equality work tied to wage labour, is one example of this (Skjeie and Teigen 2003). State feminism can also be seen as the parallel line between research and politics, which is illustrated by the use of scientific studies in

government investigations prior to political reforms (Hermansson 1993). It is possible to view the theories on state feminism and Hirdman's gender system (2001) as two tracks in the same debate, where both deal with mobilisation, negotiation and compromise. Where state feminism start out from the possibilities of a potentially women-friendly welfare state, the gender system – or in this context, the gender equality contract, which rather was seen as a labour market contract – start out from the limitations, where there were new splits between production and reproduction (Skjeie and Teigen 2003). Hirdman's concept of a gender system has since the proposition *Delad makt - delat ansvar* (Shared power – shared responsibility) (1993/94) been the basis of gender equality politics in Sweden, and clearly demonstrated that gender equality and power are closely linked. 'The things we love have many names'² and concepts like gender equality contract, labour market contract and gender power order have also been used frequently and more or less synonymously, and as expressions of gender political attempts to break the logic of separation which is part of the foundation of the power hierarchy that notions of gender both create and recreate (Hirdman 2001).

An important part of state feminism as an idea, and the political visions of an equal society, has been the idea of 'double emancipation', where men should take their reproductive responsibility and women should enter the labour market (Klinth 2002). Through this, there has long been an ambition to reform gender roles by intervening in family relations and reform society where deep patriarchal roots still exist. A general vision was, and is, that the male emancipation should be achieved through active fatherhood, where 'daddy politics' has become one of the most important parts of gender equality politics. The parental insurance, which was implemented in 1974 and which has been gradually reinforced through paternity months, was a unique reform where men were given a reproductive responsibility. Internationally, this was described as 'an experiment in social engineering' (Lamb and Levine 1983, 39). Swedish, active fathers are often held as exemplary in international gender equality research (Haas 1992; Hobson and Morgan 2002). A child-oriented masculinity does not, however, necessarily have a connection with an equal responsibility for care and shared responsibility in working life and family life. The parental insurance has also been crucial in the practical breakthrough of the two-provider model, as it gives both women and men the possibility of a working life without income interruptions during the childbearing periods of the life cycle. The two-provider model also opened up for women's social rights as members of society – which explains the expanded relation between women and the state – rather than, as from a

2. Translation of the Swedish proverb 'Kärt barn har många namn' (A beloved child has many names), meaning that things that are popular/we like/love/, are often referred to by many different names.

historical perspective, being primarily associated with the family and male providers. From an international perspective, the Nordic countries are in a league of their own when it comes to systems which facilitate for women and men to combine family and working life (Crompton, Brockmann and Lyonette 2007; Ellingsäter and Leira 2006).

Blau, Brinton and Grusky (2006) state that in gender equality work, the 'easy wins' – those that are based on political decisions and measures – have been achieved. Educational politics are one example of such an area. What remains is the implementation of more fundamental changes in gender-bound practices and ideologies, which, problematically enough, appear to be included in what is perceived as normal and thus, as a part of the egalitarian thinking in a modern economy (op. cit., p. 29). The relation between politics and the degree of employment among women is clear. However, that is not the case when it comes to politics and housework (Gershuny and Sullivan 2003; see also Bettio and Plantenga 2004).

The gender division of labour in the home – crucial to the possibilities of working life

Managing to combine working life and family life is an ongoing matter in most people's lives and a central issue in terms of living conditions and quality of life. The issue is crucial to people's possibilities in working life and a harmonious family life, but also to people's health. Today, a lot of women and men experience 'double loyalties' between working life and family life, and there is an increased complexity for separate individuals to find balance between these spheres. Family life make up, to an ever increasing extent, an arena for negotiations, where couples can approach each other, but it also acts as a source of conflicts. This applies, not to say the least, to negotiations regarding housework.

Despite the strive for gender equality and strong family politics, we are far from shared and equal parenthood in Sweden. Men have not increased their share in the family sphere to the same extent that women have established themselves in the labour market, even though the 'daddy months' in the parental insurance have contributed to a certain shift of parental leave in the last decades. Men stood for slightly more than 20 per cent of the total parental leave used in 2009 (SCB 2010a). In other words, women still have the main responsibility for home and family matters, despite that fact that they work outside the home to the same extent as men. The same development can be seen in the rest of Europe as well, and instead of the two-provider model, concepts like a 'one and a half' or 'one and three quarters' provider model are being used. This reflects the fact that men are still working full-time and women work part-time to

varying degrees. Among full-time working women with small children, as many as 40 per cent want to cut down their working hours, while there are few men who consider it a solution, despite stating that it is difficult to combine working life and family life (Nordenmark 2004). This can be seen from the perspective that men still value wage labour higher than unpaid care work (Holter 2007) and that men do not have the same love power expectation on them as creatures of gender (cf. Jonasdottir). To work part-time is described as female adjustment strategies to manage the work-life balance (Tyrkkö 2001). The price of women's attempt to adjust working life and family life can be seen in terms of having lower income and poorer career development than men (Halrynjo 2010).

Conclusion

We now want to tie together the tendencies and patterns which have transpired in the different empirical sections, along with selected theoretical concepts, in order to compile a concluding problematisation of the conditions that the gender division of labour and gender segregation are founded on and which they also recreate.

The concept of a gender division of labour has proved to not only capture the relation between work, private life and the gender segregated labour market. The concept also covers the division of labour in the family and how gender identities are negotiated, as well as the strong connection between the gender order in the workplace and the gender order in the home. Hirdman's gender system has proved to still be useful in analyses of gender in working life, both in explaining the horizontal and vertical segregation between women and men in the labour market, as well as the equally strong gender coding of the actual work tasks and sectors in the labour market. Notions of women and men's inherent abilities, as well as the expectations that these generate, are vigorous cultural superpositions which seem hard to overcome. Women still have greater responsibility for the family sphere, but also have different work tasks, positions, work conditions, development possibilities and work environments than men, which point to a constant reproduction of gender power structures. It is, however, important to note the shifts that have taken place in the paid and unpaid work between women and men. A desegregation process is taking place, however slow, which is a result of higher education and the fact that more women enter professions that have previously been male-dominated. These shifts in paid work do not, however, correspond to a changed division between the sexes when it comes to the important, unpaid – and for the reproduction, vital – work. Study after study points to women's increased load in total and the health risks that relate to the

skewed division of the total workload in the family and working life of today, which according to Jonasdottir could be seen as the love power conditioning of women and men's possibilities in society.

The relation between politics and the degree of employment among women has had a clear direction, with the aim of levelling out inequality between women and men in the labour market, while the division of housework and the responsibility for home and family matters have been handed over to us as individuals to decide for ourselves (cf. Sullivan 2000). That this becomes problematic from a gender equality perspective can be reflected in the discussion of the past few years on shared parental insurance, where political attempts to obtain an equalisation have proven to progress very slowly. It is important to pose more questions about the relation between political guidelines and the consequences that these will have on how people actually act in reality. The question of how women's subordination in the labour market can be loosened up through active family politics is highly relevant to pose.

Through Charles Tilly (2000), we can state that the stable differences which are founded on long-term and systematic imbalances in life chances have been institutionalised. Because women and men to such a great extent adjust to the conditions that are seen as given, as well as mimic the patterns which the gender order reflects, we contribute to the generalisation of the systematic imbalance between the sexes. As long as the prevalent conditions in society and the labour market are socially acknowledged, or institutionalised if we so choose, the necessary, thorough processes of change for gender equality are likely to be slow. The gender division of labour will probably remain, even if it might be less prominent in certain groups. An adjustment is taking place and this is, in itself, one of the mechanisms that carry the inequality which seems to have taken on a permanent character. However, there is a risk that the price of the adjustment will be higher for women than for men, in terms of lower income and poorer career development on the one hand, and a heavier burden to maintain the work-life balance on the other.

The issues can also be related to a changed focus in the debate on gender equality in the media. A growing interest in issues relating to numbers and representation, not least in terms of managerial posts and posts on boards of directors, risks overclouding the structural power order between the sexes. Individual women will be able to benefit from the ongoing gender equality work, especially the work on opening up career opportunities within areas that demand higher education. These women gain access to parts of the value-creating resources that men as a group or as a category, have 'always' had access to and which have been the basis of the exploitation of women as a group/category. Other groups – and this applies to both women,

and immigrants of both genders – risk being marginalised in the ongoing individualisation of the gender equality debate.

In conclusion, we can see that from a historical perspective, women and men have gotten closer, both in working life and family life, but the continuous asymmetrical division of labour, as well as the symbolic order between the sexes, show that significant structural and attitude-related obstacles respectively, still need to be overcome in order for gender equality to be reached.

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Conditional Equality: When the Higher Educated Meet the Labour Market

Lena Gonäs and Kerstin Rosenberg

The gender composition of students in the higher education system has changed. A majority of students are women as well as graduate students. Still, women do not get the same reward from higher education as men when it comes to career patterns and economic outcomes (Rubery et al. 1999; Meyerson, Milgrom and Peterson 2006; Smith and Bettio 2008; Halryngo 2009). Is it just a matter of time before we can see a gender balance in the workplace that mirrors the educational composition of the labour force? Or is there a gendering process of another kind that education cannot beat?

We will give examples of how employers talk and act in recruitment situations. Our specific interest concerns women and men as employees. Are they looked upon as being of equal value to the employer? If there are differences; how can we describe these differences? By answering these questions we will be able to contribute to filling a knowledge gap concerning the genderisation and segregation processes in organisations.

In this article, we analyse the recruitment process by using data from a study based on interviews with 14 employers regarding skill demands and recruitment of higher educated employees in a specific, regional context. The material derives from a study in the county of Värmland in Sweden, and is part of the project 'Gender Equality and Sustainable Growth' (*Jämställd hållbar tillväxt* 2007). We will use the term *higher educated* for individuals who have taken a university degree at a university or university college.

Research questions

Our focus lies on the recruitment process of higher educated staff. We are interested in understanding how employers discuss and act when it comes to skill demands, as well as their approach and views when evaluating women and men's competence in a recruitment situation. A further interest is to study what role different higher education institutions play in supplying the labour market with qualified employees.

Our specific research questions are: (1) Are there arguments for strategic recruitment to break up the gender segregation when employing higher educated women and men? (2) What are the decisive factors when salaries and wages are being set, and are the same criteria used for male and female employees?

Theoretical points of departure

Fraser (1997) formulates our problem with her question: ‘Has the recognition of women’s rights to higher education also led to a redistribution of opportunities and possibilities for advancement and career development in working life?’ Or has higher education been granted to women, while career development is still reserved for men (SOU 2004:43)? Are we heading towards a future with high risk of a growing proletariat of overeducated, underpaid women in the labour market (*ibid.*)? Higher education has opened up possibilities for women to get education and new positions in new sectors. At the same time they do not reap the same rewards and jobs as men; instead they are either overeducated or underpaid in their jobs (Granqvist and Regnér 2003; 2004). This seems to be a pattern that appears irrespective of employment or welfare state regimes and that has to be explained by common processes at an organisational level (Blau, Brinton and Grusky 2006). In discussing forces which generate gender inequality, Blau et al. make a distinction between proximate mechanisms of change, and more distal ‘macro-level forces’. Proximate mechanisms are defined in terms of discrimination, internalisation, labour-force commitment and cultural devaluation; and macro-level forces are defined as economic, organisational, political and cultural forces. Using the macro-level forces as a starting point, they discuss changes that are positive from a gender equality perspective and which counteract negative mechanisms. Their discussion shows that discrimination is a proximate mechanism supported by all macro-level forces. The same holds for labour force commitment, measured as domestic division of labour. Based on different empirical data from contemporary research, their analysis shows that the most persistent mechanisms that shape gender inequality are different types of discrimination and the traditional gender division of housework. We see recruitment as a process where proximate mechanisms can form a discriminative pattern in organisations.

One of the macro forces is policies. It can be educational policy and equal opportunities policies, as in our case, or distinctive parts of welfare state policies. The Scandinavian welfare state model embraces the dual wage earner concept, and an egalitarian division of work between women and men. Yet we can see very strong gender divisions, both in the workplace and the household (Orloff 1993; Esping-Andersen 2002; Emerek 2006; Holt and Emerek 2008). The labour market and social policy systems still work very differently in relation to women and men, due to the fact that gender relations are based on the historic development of different institutions, rules, laws and regulations. Many countries are based on the idea of a modern citizenship and the formation of an egalitarian society;

Equal Opportunities Act¹ as well as non-discriminatory education policies² are tools in this respect. The Swedish Discrimination Act (SFS 2008:567) came into practice on 1 January 2009. As in the earlier Equal Opportunities Act (SFS 1991:433), this law both prohibits against discrimination and stipulates that active measures should be developed to bring about equality in the labour market, the educational system and society at large. This includes mapping of the employees' wages, plans for acting against unwarranted wage differences, and ban against discrimination in the whole recruitment and selection process. For our purpose here, it is important to stipulate that recruitment was defined as a specific area of importance for equal opportunity policies in the new regulation as well. This puts special demands on the employers to put together an Equal Opportunity Plan in cooperation with the employees, mostly together with union representatives. The act stipulates active equality-promotion measures and that the employer shall implement these to reach equal opportunities between women and men when it comes to working conditions, parenthood and work, work-life balance, sexual harassment, recruitment and wages. As for the higher education policy, regulations stipulate that women and men have the same rights in all areas.

Gender regimes in organisations

Policies at the organisational level – in our case educational and equal opportunities policies – should be implemented through the proximate mechanisms, according to Blau, Brinton and Grusky (2006). Connell (2006) and Acker (2006a; 2006b) use the concept *regime* to define gender order in organisations. Connell uses gender division of labour, gender relations of power, emotion and human relations, gender culture and symbolism to describe any organisation's gender regime. Acker discusses inequality regimes with almost the same set of dimensions, i.e. practices, processes, actions and meanings that result in sustaining class, gender and racial inequalities in a particular organisation (Acker 2006b). Inequalities are defined by systematic disparities in power and control over goal, resources and outcomes; workplace decisions; opportunities for promotion and interesting work; security in employment and benefits; pay and other monetary rewards; respect; pleasure in work and work relations. These regimes tend to be fluid and change over time, and are related to the surrounding society, its history, politics and culture.

1. For an analysis of the Swedish development concerning the law, see e.g. Fransson, S. 2000.; SOU 1998:6; SOU 1990: 44 and SOU 2004:43.

2. Higher education legislation (SFS 1992: 1434) chapter 1, §5, and the Anti-Discrimination Act chapter 2, §§ 1 and 5, provide ban against discrimination based on gender (as well as five other grounds for discrimination) in working life and higher education.

The Equal Opportunities Act can only be effective if it turns into concrete practices at the organisational level and is supported by the employer in each workplace. Otherwise it will be an empty institution and completely useless to the separate individual. In the equal opportunities regulations, recruitment is regarded as a tool for establishing an even gender balance in organisations. It is here that we make the connections between welfare regimes, institutions and organisations. Recruitment is a key process in organisations and we have chosen the employer's perspective, where we go behind the rhetoric of abiding equal opportunities regulations and study real actions in decision-making situations of the recruitment process. Connell shows in her study (2006) of the Australian public sector, the importance of recruitment strategies as a way to reduce gender segregation in organisations. The Swedish *Gender and Work* study showed that recruitment was largely based on networks and personnel contacts (Knocke et al. 2003; Gonäs 2006). Informal networks and contacts from the university days meant a lot when new consultants in the IT sector were to be recruited in the boom period of the early 2000s. By recruitment strategies we mean the planned process of recruiting staff in relation to established goals.

Another tool is the measures to regulate wage setting. The initial salary is important, since the pay differentials will grow over time. The employers are obligated to control that initial salaries are gender neutral. This should be treated in their plan of action for equal pay (SFS 2008:567, section 11). There are reasons to argue that the differences in career patterns and wage development over time for women and men are already laid down at the beginning of their working career.

Francine D. Blau and Lawrence M. Kahn (2006) state that it is remarkable that women's earnings have risen during a period when the wage gap was widening due to individual wages based on capacity and skill. The authors point out four reasons why wages are important: (1) economic well-being, (2) fairness and equality, (3) job characteristics, and (4) input into people's decision making. Economists define wage structure as the market return of skills, experience or high education. One explanation of the gender gap is for example given in the human-capital model, which have pointed out education and experience as important factors. The glass ceiling is an explanation of labour market discrimination. In a life cycle perspective for academic employees, the wage gap does not change until the employees are 30-32 years old (Ljunglöf and Pokarzhevskaya 2009). This is the point where men receive higher salaries than women and this will continue for the rest of their working life. Most women and men have their children at this point in their lives, but only women face stagnation in their wage development. This can, according to Ljunglöf and Pokarzhevskaya, be explained by the glass

ceiling, structural wage differences, male domination in the private sector, or sex related differences in wage setting.

Another illustration of the gender wage gap can be found within the European Union (EU), where women in 2008 earned 17.5 % less than men did on average, over the course of their lifetime (Europaportalen.se). The gender wage gap over a lifetime means the women receive lower pensions than men. As a result of this, older women risk being poor – 22 % of women over 65 risk being poor, while the corresponding figure for men is 16 % (ibid.) The same wage for work of equal value is a basic principle within the EU and was stated already in the Treaty of Rome (1957). However, the process to decrease the gender wage gap proceeds slowly.

Methods and material

The empirical data for this research comes from a study conducted in the county of Värmland, Sweden.³ Together with the regional competence centres, we selected (consultant) companies in four male-dominated regional clusters: *Paper Province*, *Steel and Engineering*, *Compare Karlstad Foundation* and *The Packaging Arena*. We interviewed staff in leading positions, responsible for Human Resource Management, specifically in the areas of recruitment and wage setting. Our concern was to highlight the need for new competence, the recruitment situation and the demand on formal education, along with ways of recruitment and the criteria used in the selection of individuals for interviews and employment. Our questionnaire followed a study made in a region of similar size, Norrköping (see Knocke et al. 2003; Gonäs 2006). The second field of interest was wage setting and we asked about wage policy, criteria for wage setting, implementation of the Equal Opportunities Act/Discrimination Act and actions taken to break gender stereotyped recruitment, and if applicable, the effects of such actions. In the interviews we also asked about the connection between the regional university and the company in question, and to what extent higher education in the region responded to the demands of the companies.

The interviews lasted from 1 to 1½ hours each, and were transcribed and analysed according to the specific questions in the research plan. We coded the answers with help of concepts and categories that illustrated the processes of recruitment and wage setting in order to find angles of approach and to formulate concepts that reflected the contents of the interviews (Miles and Huberman 1994; Strauss and Corbin 1998). Starrin et al. (1991) point to the necessity of searching for concepts that summarize the material and at the

3. The study (JämVäxt) is a result of an overview of the regional developments in the region from a gender perspective and on the basis of the OECD report (2006), *Supporting the Contribution of Higher Education Institutions to Regional Development. Peer Review Report: Värmland Region, Sweden*.

same time make an analysis of connections and the course of events possible.

We tried to find gender specific phenomena that surface during the recruitment process which could be identified with the help of different characteristics. We chose to take the recruitment process as such, as our point of departure in order to see where in this chain the issue of gender gets attention and meets reflection. One ambition was to study how gender is articulated when an organisation has to adapt to changing conditions and increased competition in a globalised world. Our strategy as researchers has been to describe the process and where in this process that gender becomes an issue. One tool in analysing recruitment is the Staircase for Recruitment, constructed by the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman (JämO 2006), with its eleven steps. It was done in order to help employers hire personal on gender equal conditions. The first step was to write a plan with goals for recruitment and actions in the short- and long-term. The Discrimination Act states that the employer is to make a special effort to attract applicants of the under-represented sex when recruiting new employees. Secondly, the employer should build a recruitment group of both women and men. This will give all applicants the chance to be seen in different ways and on objective grounds. Step three concerns the capability match, and advice is given to discuss in advance how to understand different matches. The recruitment channels are discussed in step four. They may be complemented with e.g. newspapers that are read mostly by women or by men, and cooperation with schools is recommended. The steps deal with the themes of manager recruitment, announcement, interview, classification, decision to employ, and finally: evaluation. The purpose of the staircase is that every employer who recruits new employees with the use of a gender neutral approach contributes to the development of a gender equal society. These steps in their entirety were covered to a greater or lesser extent in our interviews.

A network-based selection process

In the IT consultant companies, the selection of possible candidates was made by a specific recruitment group. In this group, consensus was important. If it was impossible to reach an agreement, the common opinion about a specific individual, as well as a 'second opinion', was asked for. If this second round led to consensus, the person in question was employed. The same logic and approach were used by the companies in the Norrköping study (Knocke et al. 2003), where in the case of no consensus the recruitment process had to restart. A crucial requirement was that the applicants had to 'fit into a group'. Network recruitment was seen as a good way of getting candidates for employment in consultant companies, but this way of recruiting increases the risk of being excluded on grounds of gender or ethnicity. One of the proximate

mechanisms, cultural devaluation (Blau, Brinton and Grusky 2006), becomes a risk in this situation, when everybody has to fit into the group.

In the consultant business, formal education was seen as a certification for work. Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in Sweden are important suppliers of potential employees for various companies. But the quality of education at different HEIs was questioned by the interviewees and there was an uncertainty whether the students, after graduating, always had the competence needed. We found that IT companies demand their staff to have the highest level of education. Their experience from the last few years had given them reason not to accept a lower level than a one-year master's degree in engineering.

Character and social skills were of great importance when deciding what type of tasks that the individual would be assigned. High performance, intellectual capacity and flexibility were criteria for employment, especially for IT consultants. That was because the tasks were to a large extent about communicating with people. The ability to quickly engage in new work tasks were highlighted by the interviewees.

As the companies act on a global market more and more, the employees' experience and knowledge among must – especially among IT consultants – be globally competitive. Human capital has to be nurtured and developed along the way as new projects develop. These findings are also supported by Knocke et al. (2003), in that personality and social competence among the employees are important, especially in terms of 'fitting into a group'. The following quote is from one of our interviewees who worked in the IT cluster, and mirrors the broadened competence concept:

And the competence you know, the raw technical competence, is subordinated to the individual. We prefer someone who is the right person from this service perspective, you know. Yes, we reject the one with top results in the technical field as they probably fit in better in a really large company, where they can get a small specific field of responsibility down in one of Ericsson's mobile switch boards or something similar where you don't need to meet the customer every day.

To get good service performers onboard and that they stay on, is invaluable for the organisations and the companies, and they invest in their employees as if they were 'structural capital': 'The company is just the people, we own nothing, rent everything. If the high-quality consultants disappear, our structural capital disappears as well.'

Women who enter the organisations must be at least as competent as their male colleagues. This means that there is a possibility that women

will outperform their male co-workers and contribute to a higher economic return than men do. In a situation where a female IT consultant does not have enough competence or knowledge for a certain task, a problem arises. The ideal employee could be a woman, however, she would have to be without the demands of motherhood. In order to be a flexible resource for the employer, the employee has to have a stable family situation; the women have to be like men in their family responsibilities. To summarise in terms of gender regimes, it is the individual as a whole that is recruited, not just a person with formal education; social competence and family responsibilities, both present and future, is also taken into account. The employer needs stability in the investment, and the employee's capacities and possibilities are seen as the structural capital of the company.

Culture and values

According to our interviewees, there is an interaction between how familiar a consultant is with the culture and values of the organisation, and their ability to communicate with the customers. Several companies have developed a tool for the analysing of personal profiles. This analytical tool is used in the latter part of the recruitment process, when only two or three aspirants are left. This means that if there are already a group of employees, where the majority have a personal profile as 'doers', there is a need for an analytical person who can 'tie up the loose ends'. The grandfather *principle* is used by the companies to insure that the right persons are employed at higher levels. The principle implies that if a Chief Financial Officer was going to be employed, it was not only the Managing Director who was involved in the process, but the Board of Management as well. When it came to lower levels, they were recruited at Workshop Manager level with some help from the Personnel Manager. Here as well, the grandfather principle was applied, as the Production Manager was often involved in the process.

Again we found examples of approximate mechanisms, working along the lines of tradition, known policies and values. To change these mechanisms, an active policy is needed from those who are in a decision-making position (Connell 2006).

The professional role often includes a lot of travelling and being away from home, especially in the IT industry. Difficulties to meet flexibility and mobility demands are still greater for women than for men when family responsibilities increase (Bergman and Gardiner 2007). To be a parent with small children means different things for women and men, as has been shown by several studies before. Bekkengen (2002), for example, points to the fact that parenthood for men is regarded as a stabilising factor, not only for the individual father but also for the organisation where he is working. Women

are a risk factor, and their parenthood fuels instability in the workplace. If both parents are consultants, there is a need for support in the family sphere to help tackle the extra burdens when one or both parents are away.

Yes, the girls are dog-tired and it has a direct impact on their performance. There are examples of where they are so worn-out when they come here on Monday morning that they have to recover here until the next weekend. That is really difficult. (Chief Information Officer of an IT company)

The problems are individualised and seen as something that the women have to solve on their own. At the same time, generational differences are obvious. Older men, sometimes with housewives, feel that they have to cover for the younger generation, which leads to tensions among the employees.

Gender equality and wage setting

Our study indicates that the equal opportunities regulations are known at company level. Several of the companies have formulated a plan for actions for gender equality and they also claimed to be a gender equal workplace.

The general gender wage gap in Sweden was 14.8 percent 2009. Looking at profession, sector, education, age and hour of work, the gender wage gap was still 6.0 percent. The changes in the wage relationship between the sectors of the labour market were very small during the years 1992–2009 and the gender wage gap decreased with only 1 percent during the same period (National Mediation Office 2010). A deeper analysis of the gender wage gap for management work in the private sector, shows that women are forthcoming but at a rather ‘low level’. There are no clear patterns; in four professions, the gender wage gap remains unchanged; in eleven it has decreased; and in ten the gender wage gap has increased. With regard to a specific occupational group in our study, engineers, the initial salary differ between women and men as they enter the labour market. In 2010 women were paid more than 1 000 SEK less than men on their first job, according to statistics covering newly graduated members of *Sweden’s Engineers* (Sweden’s Engineers 2011).

The statistics for wages in the County of Värmland show that men, on average, earn over 2 000 SEK more per month than women in the ten largest occupational groups (Värmland 2010). A comparison with the national statistics for Sweden gives a similar picture (SCB 2010). Lower entrance salaries for women can be seen as one of the principal causes for women’s lower wages over the course of their professional lives.

An important part in wage setting in our study is how employees manage to handle relationships with customers. Additional criteria with relevance

for wages are the individual employee's performance and development in the company and the specific interest that the employee shows in producing new products and services. All employees in a consultancy company need, for example, to focus more on the customer needs of 'tomorrow' and to be observant of which type of services and products that will be attractive to customers in the future. The development of the individual and whether the employee shows interest in his/her development, combined with a willingness to share their progress with colleagues, are important factors.

Yes, this [...] is an important bit, that you don't lock yourself into your own sphere and keep the knowledge to yourself. Then to take the initiative and have drive; 'I can now do this very well so why don't I invite my colleagues in the same field and present my knowledge on a theme evening?' – or something like that. (CEO of an IT Company)

The consultant companies in particular, earn their living by making sure that as much of their time as possible is chargeable. This is crucial to them and therefore also an important wage setting indicator. Over a period of 10 years, two persons – with initially the same type of job and the same initial salary – can have a substantial difference in wages based on their personal work performance. Once high performance employees have reached the 'company top salary', their wages tend to level out. They are nevertheless expected to continue to work with the same speed and quality.

The basis for wage setting is the employee's commitment and performance. The salary is individual and differentiated. The individual's salary can be compared with work results and competence in other companies. An employer in one of the companies in the study defined what a fair salary is to him: '[It is] when I feel that I get paid for what I can and I am paid according to the market and in relation to the level of my colleagues.'

Everybody wants a fair salary. In the study, the employers tied fair salaries to the employee's individual experience and competence. Fair wage setting was also related to colleagues within the same profession, as well as to the market conditions. One employer stated: 'There is no such thing as a fair wage; there is always someone who has got a better one.' Our conclusion is that it seems more correct to talk about a satisfying level/rate of the salary, than a fair salary (Smith 1994).

Fair wage setting was defined on grounds of how the job was done in relation to other employees in the same profession. Wage statistics were one guide of how high the salary could be, as well as of the wage level in the company. Age and seniority affected the salary in that a 20 year-old could not have the same salary as a 60 year-old with the same work tasks,

even if they formally were equally skilled. The younger employees could, however, have a good wage development and thus increase their salary. The older employees could experience a real wage reduction due to inflation, something that was sometimes seen as unfair.

When people are employed, they are valued on the basis of their formal education and professional skills. As time goes by, performance becomes a wage setting criterion. Performance includes everything from how well a job is carried out, to whether they succeed in acquiring projects to the company or if they are ready to work outside the office.

Colliding rationalities

Formal education is a license to work. In our study, certain catchwords stood out as central requirements in working life today: flexibility, mobility, adaptability and availability. The individual's personal characteristics are of great importance to the Information and Communication Technology sector. The employees are expected to be flexible towards all kinds of people and to different types of work. Learning at the workplace, e.g. to quickly engage in new tasks and take up new ideas, is a prerogative. Employees are also expected to be available at almost all times and be prepared to be away from home for a couple of days a week. To be mobile is a demand which beyond doubt is easier for men than women to meet during their working career, considering the prevailing division of work in the family.

To be of the view that the traditional gender division in families still governs the actions of young women and men, leads the employers to make stereotypical decisions in the recruitment process. Halrynjo (2009) concludes in her study of men's working careers, that even if the number of options to adapt to the challenges of working life increases, they do not change the hierarchical structure of career and family matters.

The young employees had a different view on the role of work than older employees. It is possible that changing family responsibilities among men are seen as a threat towards a lingering industrialist view of the role of work. Also, a growing postmodern view on the role of work, including individual freedom and a more egalitarian division of the family responsibilities, shape new rationalities in working life (Edwards and Wajcman 2005). Linked to this, is whether the wage earner concept is slowly getting a new interpretation and whether this also affects the relation between the employer and the employees. But the question is how these tendencies can govern the employers' actions and decision making.

In dual-career families, where both women and men strive for high returns on their education in terms of good working conditions, highly qualified work tasks and good income, individuals probably have a different

relation to the employer than a person who is the sole career for the family. When the employers in our study mentioned that young employees identified themselves with their work in a different way from them, this can have various explanations. Family responsibilities in a two-career family put physical restrictions on possible activities. Since the alternative here is not of an 'either-or' character as it relates to family and children, there is a need to find solutions that create space for flexibility.

In addition, the type of work that we saw in our study – often time-fixed projects – supports the individualism that came across in the interviews with the employers. It puts new demands on the organisations to maintain long-term relations with costumers that might not be of interest to develop for the individual employee. A change in the gender division of family obligations and the way that work tasks are organised, seem to play a role when younger employees define their future visions of work. Shorter working hours, a more flexible work organisation and a higher material standard, are ingredients of this vision, as the employers perceive it. Results from our study seem to indicate that the development in working life is not moving directly in the direction of shorter working hours.

Growing gender awareness

There is a clearly pronounced wish from the management level in the male-dominated workplaces of our study, to act for gender equality. Moreover, industries and organisations in the region admit that it is 'nicer' with a mixed male and female organisation. Many different types of new projects have started with this in mind. Regional top industries have initiated projects to encourage girls in the lower grades to be more technically oriented. They refer in leaflets to previously employed women as role models to attract young women to technical industries. It is also a fact that women who are responsible for recruiting new employees are more observant of the importance of changing the gender balance, than male recruiters (SOU 1997:135). Research also confirms that when we reach a certain threshold, i.e. that a certain number of women had been employed, it will be easier to attract more women.

To use the wage level as a recruitment strategy is rather problematic in Sweden. Wage setting is principally regulated at central a level between national trade unions and employers' associations. Different occupations and educational levels are organised in different trade unions. To implement the regulations that concern unwarranted wage differences is still very difficult, since knowledge about the regulations remains insufficient (e.g. Rosenberg 2004). An interesting result of our study is that we did not get any confirmation in our interviews of differences in wage setting levels between women and men in the male-dominated companies we visited. On

the other hand, women and men often have different work tasks at the same workplace, and different jobs are paid at different rates, whereas women and men at the same jobs are often paid equal wages. The male-dominated branch of our study had just a few women employed and they had the same working conditions as men. This result seems to confirm what was found in earlier studies by Sundin (1998) and Rosenberg (2004). There is a smaller gender wage gap when men and women do the same work, but in general male-dominated jobs are better paid and have higher status than female-dominated jobs (SCB 2010).

Conditional egalitarian gender regimes – concluding remarks

The recognition of women's rights to higher education has led to a redistribution of opportunities and possibilities for advancement and career development in the companies addressed in the study. Our interviewees had plans for gender equality and efforts were made to level out differences between the salaries of female and male employees. However, there were preconditions. According to our first research question, we found no signs of strategic recruitment for breaking up the gender segregation when employing higher educated women and men. The companies still pursued the economic line of argumentation, where female labour comes with higher costs than male, due to different expectations on women and men. In answering the second research question, we would state that, as the employees have children and start families, this economic line of argumentation places the perceived costs for the company with the female employees and the benefits with the male employees. On the one hand, we found arguments for the employment of more women in recruitment situations in traditionally male-dominated professions. Women can be more competent and outperform many male colleagues. However, on the other hand, the demand from the employers of constant availability undermines this ambition (Kvande and Rasmussen 2007). Also, the fact that men are choosing men is found and confirmed in many situations (see SOU 1997:135; Rosenberg 2001). This is why the 'grandfather principle' has been coined in the first place, and why there is no such thing as the 'grandmother principle'. We find this rule to reign both in recruitment and in wage setting situations.

Our results concerning the recruitment process provide evidence of a tension between the economic and egalitarian discourses regarding women's participation and earnings in working life. The right to education and access to positions in working life in relation to one's own qualifications is granted to women, but in practice these rights are still conditional at the organisational level. This gap between the rhetorical field of equality and the practice of equality paves the way for a broad arbitrariness in the implementation of the

national political goals, and opens up for discrimination in recruitment, career development and wage setting over time. The employees have a symbolic capital in terms of availability (Kvande and Rasmussen 2007; Bergman and Gardiner 2007), but the possibilities to use it are gendered. As Håpnes and Rasmussen (2007) show, companies can act differently and so can employees. In a family friendly context, the social contract between employers and employees can lead to reduced working hours, but it does not limit the effort from the employees' side. As a result, it is difficult for the employees to maintain the line between work and family. On the other hand, with a more market-driven contract, the employees can follow the time tables and keep up with the time schedules, but in the event of market failure their contract might not be renewed. The arbitrariness and conditionality at the organisational level have to be seen in the light of the values and culture of the organisation, but the strength of the market related argumentation must be observed by the employers.

Women still have to perform better than men, even when having the educationally based knowledge and skills required, as well as social competence. This especially applies if they want to have the same wage as men. Women are allowed into the more prestigious jobs, but the issues of parenthood and the unequal distribution of unpaid work between women and men in the family, are more important to address than ever. It will be difficult because the employers still see men as the basic wage earners, who provide stability to both family and work organisation. The perception among certain employers, of an increasing individualism in male behaviour at work, and a materialistic approach, might be a result of men's increasing participation in family obligations.

One reason for the different conditions of wages and career chances for women and men, is statistical discrimination. The unequal distribution of housework functions as a proximate discrimination mechanism in organisations and contributes to forming an unequal gender regime in companies (Blau, Brinton and Grusky; Acker 2006b). Given the fact that more women than men do unpaid, reproductive work at home, all women are expected to do so. This means that women, despite being high performers in organisations, are still being treated with ambivalence in relation to a possible period of family formation and child bearing. Traditional perceptions of women and men's roles in society are still seen as the basis for decisions where short-term economic accounting weighs more than the organisations' long-term perspective, as well as individuals' skills and competence.

Our conclusion is that the gender regimes of the companies in our study are directed by constant availability and conditional equality. The gap between rhetoric and practice when it comes to gender equality may be closed by using gender proofed recruitment and job evaluations for equal pay for work of equal value, thereby connecting the political and organisational levels.

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Challenging Gender in Teacher Education

Maria Hedlin and Magnus Åberg

'Very few women could manage a situation like that'

These words were uttered by a male teacher educator, we can call him Nils, in a conversation with one of us researchers during a coffee break in between seminars. The seminars dealt with bullying in schools and were held for teacher students. Normally, Nils worked as a school teacher at a secondary school located in a town in the south of Sweden. This particular day, he had been invited to the teacher education programme to lecture on how to prevent bullying.

The students listened attentively. Nils was well experienced and gave a confident and trustworthy impression. He talked from an authoritative position, stressing that he had worked in schools for more than 25 years, and provided prompt and quick answers to the students' often very concrete questions on how to manage problematic pupils or situations in school. He showed no self-doubt and seemed to have the ambition to give sound advice to the students, rather than aiming for a joint investigation of the matter with them.

Although the topic of conversation was bullying, Nils's monologue was penetrated by a discourse of gender difference. Several times, he emphasised the differences between boys and girls, arguing for example that girls were more empathetic and more socially skilled than boys. He also claimed that girls nowadays were responsible for most of the bullying going on in schools, and that it was executed through psychological, rather than physical, abuse. His ideas on gender were never challenged, neither by the teacher educator who was responsible for the seminar and who had invited him, nor by the teacher students or us researchers.

In this paper¹, we will address the question of how gender is played out in teacher education. This will be done through an investigation of different in-class situations where teacher educators and teacher students explicitly or implicitly address gender issues. Our aim is to explore mechanisms that work to enhance or challenge the gender regime in teacher education. In particular, we will put forward the notion of reflexivity as a key challenge for teacher educators aiming to create socially just classrooms.

1. This paper draws on ethnographic material collected within a R&D-project –Teacher Education Challenges Gender – conducted between September 2010 and June 2011 and financed by The Delegation for Gender Equality in Higher Education.

Background and previous research

The education of teachers has long been a site of political battle. In 2001, a left-wing government reformed the Swedish teacher education at a national level. This reformed educational programme has been widely criticised and the new right-wing government, which came to power in 2006, stated early on that they would swiftly make major changes in the teacher education programme (Åberg 2008). These changes, or rather, this yet again completely revised version of the teacher education programme, came into effect in 2011.

Although there has been a lot of political and public debate on teacher education during the last decade, gender issues have only occasionally been addressed. This goes for Swedish research as well. Much of the research-based attention has been paid to gender relations in schools, especially among pupils. Teachers and teacher education have to a much lesser extent been scrutinised from a gender perspective. This is quite remarkable, given the historical impact of gender on the teaching profession.

In the 1800s, elementary school teaching started as a male occupation with low status. An argument for allowing women to enter the profession was that teaching children would be suitable for women and in line with their 'natural' nurturing and caring qualities. Thus, teaching would not violate prevailing norms of femininity. A school-mother ideal was put forward in the second half of the 1800s. According to norms of femininity, women should practice patience, self-discipline and show love for children. These were presented as particularly suitable qualities for teaching in junior elementary school (Florin 1987). In the year 1900, practically all junior elementary school teachers were low-paid women (Wieselgren 1969; Mellberg 1996). Men were expected to have 'disciplining skills' and thus be better suited to teach older pupils and particularly boys. The ideal of the fatherly teacher was put forward at the expense of the ideal of the motherly teacher (Wieselgren 1969; Florin 1987; Olofsson 1996).

The gender segregation among teachers of the early years of school still remains. In Sweden today, some three per cent of preschool pedagogues are men, while in upper secondary school the ratio is around 50 per cent men (Skolverket 2010). There is also research showing that the 'Lady Bountiful' myth about female teachers prevails. Historically, this stereotype was embodied by the white, middle-class women who saw the profession as a calling, who gave everything to the children, and who forsook their own needs and feelings (Meiners 2002; cf. Evans 2002:43). In another ongoing study of ours, we found indications that some teacher students repeat these stereotypes (Hedlin and Åberg 2012).

Gender issues in teacher education concern more than just notions of the ideal teacher. Gender has to do with the distribution of power, of inclusion

and exclusion, of the connection between teachers and children's values, among other things. Critics claim that gender issues are not given enough – or proper – attention, neither in Swedish schools nor in teacher education (RFSU 2004; Reimers 2007; Skolinspektionen 2010). Research has stressed that a problem within teacher education is its preoccupation with girls and boys, e.g. treating gender as a question of 'management' (Åberg 2008) or by treating pupils as the cause of gender related problems (Nordenmark 2010). This is not a novel phenomenon. Hedlin (2009; 2011) has shown how dominant gender norms have been discussed in Swedish school policy debate since the 1960s, as something that primarily concerns the young. At the same time, and as pointed out by other researchers, teachers are often expected to be 'role models' and portray a certain kind of given heterosexual normality (Lundgren 2008; Reimers 2008).

Gender and ethnography

A central concept in our study is *gender*, i.e. shared preconceptions of sex and sexuality, which are constructed and sustained through social relations (Connell 2009). These social relations are upheld by spoken language, texts, artefacts and bodily practices. Gender is often done in unintended ways, through *unreflexive gender practices* (Martin 2003; 2006). This means that practices and actions which may appear to be random, well-meaning and non-gendered, can affect men and women in different ways, often resulting in power asymmetries between the sexes. Men and women can be equally responsible for creating gender. But the distribution of power can be uneven as a result of the construction of gender. This also concerns relations within the gender groups, not all versions of masculinity are culturally sanctioned (Connell 2005).

Historically, there has been a pattern in the power relations between men and women, masculinities and femininities, referred to as a gender order. The gender order splits men from women, and distributes power unequally between them. Following Connell, the gender order may be played out differently in different settings. This more local form, which follows the logic of the gender order, is referred to as a gender regime (Connell 1987).

Gender, and the tracing of gendering processes, is the theoretical node in this study. However, the development in research on gender over the past few years has also acknowledged the interconnections between gender and other categories, such as social class, ethnicity, generational belonging, religious beliefs and so forth (de los Reyes and Mulinari 2005; Liinason 2009). The relational, intersectional character of gender is important. Gender is not given; rather it is continuously being constructed through social practices which are tied to spatial and temporal events. We therefore

hold an ethnographic methodological framework to be useful in discovering mechanisms that sustain or challenge the gender order.

We have followed seven teacher educators (four women and three men), affiliated with three teacher education units in central and southern Sweden. The educators volunteered to participate in the study. Some of them have a lot of experience dealing with gender issues, whereas others are interested, but not as experienced in these matters. They represent subject disciplines ranging from the social sciences to liberal arts.

To minimise ethical pitfalls and gain necessary distance to the research object, we have not conducted our fieldwork at the higher education institutions that we belong to (cf. Fangen 2005). Observations have been made in various types of in-class situations, such as lectures, seminars, workshops and video conferences. We observed how gender was expressed both explicitly and implicitly. Following Martin (2003; 2006), gender differences are often created and sustained through unreflexive gender practices. Gender can have an impact on all social situations, but we sought primarily to attend educational situations where gender – or other questions concerning norms and values – was a curricular activity. This way we gained the opportunity to compare how the discussion on gender might correlate with, or oppose, more subtle expressions of gender.

Challenging essentialism – the problem of intervention

We now return to the seminar with Nils, the temporary teacher educator presented in the introductory part of this paper. Given what we stated earlier about gender being constructed in social relations, the seminar initially struck us as fairly disappointing from a research perspective, as there was almost no dialogue taking place. The level of interaction seemed to be low. However, the fact that one person dominated the seminar so profoundly does not mean that there were no social relations in play. The students did not have to sit silent, the responsible teacher educator did not have to restrain from intervening, and the same goes for us researchers. We all accepted the authoritative discourse invoked by Nils. This does not mean that he was in charge of the events in the seminar; rather, he was discursively positioned as being in charge. This positioning rested on his own actions, but equally as much on our active silence (Foucault 2002).

We do not know what the students took with them from the seminar, given that we had no chance of a follow-up. But three things put together make the seminar rather problematic: (1) the authoritative position from which Nils spoke; (2) his essentialist argument for gender difference; and (3) that the students and Nils focused on concrete ‘helpful’ advice on how to manage bullying in schools. Taken all together, this made Nils’s words

powerful – it was as if he possessed the correct version of how to act and think as teacher. At one point of his lecture he stressed the need for the students to develop ‘conversational techniques’. He claimed that, ‘If you do not know this [technique], the pupils will get you! They are extremely good at negotiations’. He also spoke of his role as a teacher with references to the army and the interrogation techniques of the police, and thus painting a picture of the school as a harsh world, where you need to be determined, firm, strong and smart. There was a correlation between how he viewed himself and his conception of the school environment. What schools seem to need is a masculine figure, such as himself. So when he stressed that students need to develop conversational skills, the whispering comment from one student to another was perhaps not very surprising: ‘[You mean] talk the way you do...’

The student’s comment was not scornful; rather, it had a tone of admiration in it. It was as if she questioned how on earth it would be possible for her to become as good a teacher as Nils. And how could she, given the ideal that Nils seemed to paint with his lecture, less she changed gender...

This was the end of the seminar. Afterwards, Nils and researcher Magnus got hold of some coffee and stood by themselves at a table, sipping from their mugs.

Magnus: Do you feel that the gender of the teacher matters when it comes to managing bullying?

Nils: Yes, absolutely! (ponders for a while) Take for example the situation I mentioned in the seminar, with the big, strong boy who I threatened with a relocation to another school. Very few women would be able to manage a situation like that.

One thing which is striking with Nils’s quote is that the gender of the teacher was not once mentioned during the actual seminar. Although he talked a lot about gender, it only revolved around the gender differences of the pupils. But the underlying assumption becomes clear in the last quote, i.e. that female and male teachers are different and that they therefore need to act differently as teachers. Perhaps it would have been easier for the students to challenge Nils’s world view, had he spelled this out more clearly in the actual seminar. It might have been more provoking if he had addressed individual female students with ‘the fact’ that they are not the best choice when it comes to managing bullying.

What we believe was lacking in this seminar, was a mode of reflexivity. Reflexivity acknowledges that all knowledge bears the impress of the social relations entailed in its production, including the complex power relations

between researchers and research participants, teacher educators and teacher students (cf. Bondi 2009). After the seminar, we researchers discussed the seminar with the teacher educator who was responsible for it, Michael. Michael said that he found some of Nils's comments problematic, and we asserted that we did so too. We tried to get to grips with why we had not intervened, by trying to problematise Nils's conception of gender. Michael stated that it was hard for him, given that he had invited Nils and did not want to challenge him since he kindly had taken time to hold the seminar. As researchers, we found it hard to intervene as well, given that Michael kindly had granted us to attend, and that we were not that well acquainted with him, and even less so with Nils and the students. All of this was really poor excuses for not challenging comments which we all found profoundly problematic. What really hindered any expression of the reflexive thoughts that we, and possibly some of the students had, was the way Nils used experience as a tool to exert power. As shown by other researchers, experience can be used to 'prove' that something has actually occurred in the way that it is presented (Ers 2006, 82). Nils had been there, he had seen it, he knew. It seemed as if he possessed the 'magic of presence' (Andersson 2000). In short, Nils's reference to experience enhanced his authoritative position and made it possible for him to spread-eagle and occupy the mental space of the seminar room (cf. Young 1990). The effect: We all shut up.

In order for reflexivity on gender issues to gain ground in educational settings, there must be room for dialogue, interchange of opinions, and scrutiny of ideas (cf. hooks 2010). Many of the seminars we have attended have in fact contained a lot of verbal interaction between teacher educator and students. In the next section we will investigate how gender is constructed and managed within that type of setting.

Superficial reflexivity

We will now discuss a verbal exchange that took place in a seminar that dealt with gender, ethnicity and class. Our aim here is to put focus on how gender and discriminatory practices are constructed in a 'normal' conversation which, as with all conventional conversations, rests on implicit understandings. In the conversation, well-known and widely spread discourses are used, along with story lines and stereotypes (Davies and Harré 1990). Therefore, the processes and the implicit understandings, *not* the individual students, are in focus.

This seminar also took place within teacher education. Twelve teacher students were present. Ten of them were women and two of them were men. A few of the students mentioned their immigrant background. They, or their families, had come to Sweden from European countries, such as Bosnia. The

rest of the students had Swedish backgrounds. Gender, ethnicity and class were defined and discussed in the seminar. Gender was defined as the social role, in contrast to the biological sex.

At the end of the seminar, the teacher tries to initiate a discussion about gender and power. A student associates power with criminal gangs and weapons. The teacher says that there are different types of power. He explains that theoretically, a distinction between coercive power, decisional power and structural power can be made. To illustrate structural power, he turns to the female student sitting next to him. He asks her why it is that he, being a man, has more power than she does as a woman. Clearly, he is referring to the gender order, in which men and masculinity are attributed higher status than women and femininity. The student, however, does not seem to understand that the teacher is referring to a structural matter. She looks surprised and responds by questioning him having more power than she does. 'Historically, men have been the ones in power', the teacher replies. Then the following discussion takes place among five female students with Swedish background:

Student 1: There is so much left from old times. Nevertheless, we have come a long way in Sweden and really, it shouldn't be a problem. Yet still, we keep on struggling!

Student 2: In immigrant families, the father usually makes the decisions – the mother has no say.

Student 3: When I was doing my teaching practice, the girls were the troublemakers.

Student 4: Girls and boys deal with conflicts in different ways. Women speak ill of each other and men fight.

Student 5: Yes, girls speak ill of each other, whereas guys are more honest.

Examining the short discussion above, we find that all students respond to the previous speaker. However, each student also brings up a new story line. When the teacher mentions that men have been in power historically, Student 1 agrees and says that a lot is left from old times. Yet, she then brings up a story line that constructs Sweden as the country of gender equality. Since the ideal of gender equality is very strong in Sweden, a gender equality discourse is widely spread. In this discourse Sweden is referred to as one of the most, or even *the* most gender equal country in the world. Furthermore, being gender equal is interpreted in terms of being modern and successful (Nordberg 2005). However, there is a clear ambivalence in the student's remarks. On the one hand, saying that we have come a long way is

optimistic. On the other hand, she finishes by noting that we still struggle, which is a more pessimistic statement. Moreover, according to her wording the gender problem should not really be an issue. This remark may indicate that the student is confused about why historical circumstances still have an impact on societal values.

Next, Student 2 brings up the gender equality discourse by referring to immigrant families. Researchers have shown how the Swedish self-image as modern and gender equal, is upheld by using 'immigrants' as contrasts. Non-Swedes from a number of different countries are treated as one, homogeneous group. All Swedes are also homogenised. In this difference-creating discourse which constructs the categories, the categories are hierarchically graded. Swedish women and men stand out as having the same freedom and rights when compared with 'immigrants', who are victims of their outdated cultures and family values. Thus, through the stigmatisation of an 'other', one positions oneself as being better and thus one's own positive identity as Swedish is strengthened. Moreover, the gender equality discourse can be used in a positioning practice that constructs affinity between 'us Swedes' and a distance to 'them immigrants' (Molina and de los Reyes 2003; Bredström 2003).

When Student 2 claims that it is the father in immigrant families who makes the decisions, whereas the mother has no voice, two stereotypes are being used that are often repeated by the Swedish media. In the media, the 'immigrant guy' is frequently described as active, but in a negative way, whereas the 'immigrant girl' is portrayed as obedient and well-behaved (SOU 2006:21). Through this way of reasoning, two general gender stereotypes are brought to the fore: the active man and the passive woman (Svahn 1999; Pettersson 2003). Also, these stereotypes illustrate the binary division between femininity and masculinity, and how men and women are attributed different characteristics and behaviour (Davies 2003).

However, Student 3 responds to the stereotypes by challenging the cliché of the passive female. The student speaks of her experience of girls as troublemakers. This statement also contests another closely related stereotype: the image of women as victims.

Student 4 contributes to the theme on girls as troublemakers, but she adds boys to this discussion. On the basis of the binary gender division between femininity and masculinity, men are constructed as a homogeneous group, and so are women (Davies 2003). The student claims that girls and boys handle disagreements in different ways and the stereotypes of the gossiping women and fighting men are brought up, thus connecting to how Nils spoke of gender difference in the previous section (Svahn 1999).

Student 5 makes it clear that she agrees by saying: 'Yes, girls speak ill of

each other'. However, then she adds her own comment, an interpretation of the fighting men. Men are constructed as more honest. We do not know if that is what the previous speaker implied, but it is not what was said. Thus, a shift of meaning is made. Claiming that fighting is honest might seem far-fetched. One might say that it would idealise violence. Nevertheless, there is a strong connection between violence and masculinity (Kolnar 2006; Connell 1987; Pettersson 2003). Furthermore, to bring up the binary discourse means to construct masculinity and femininity as opposites. Therefore, in this example, men are attributed with being honest in order to contrast the gossiping and insidious women.

Previously, in the stigmatisation of 'immigrants' the student's own positive identity as Swedish, was strengthened. So how can we understand a young woman bringing up the stereotypes of the gossiping and insidious women as a contrast to the honest men? If women are constructed as gossiping and false human beings, logically this ought to mean that she herself is a false and dishonest person. However, a possible explanation is that she is referring to women in a more general sense, implying that she herself is an exception. This interpretation is supported by the fact that she says that 'girls' speak ill of each other. She does not say that 'we' speak ill of each other. This can be compared with Student 1 who said that 'we have come a long way in Sweden'. In this 'we', Student 1 clearly included herself.

According to Connell (1987), there are multiple femininities, just as there are different masculinities. Both the various femininities and the masculinities are hierarchically ordered. Marking a distance from women in general can be a way to position oneself as a representative of a femininity of a higher status. Thus, a positive feminine identity may be strengthened (cf. Pettersson 2003).

The conversation between the five students above illustrates how the students pick up stereotypes, story lines and dominant discourses. It may be referred to as a rather typical common-sense conversation. As Kumashiro (2009) notes, the trouble with common sense, is that it rests on assumptions, expectations and values that neither are made visible nor are challenged. Embedded in each of the remarks above, there are assumptions that obviously pass without reflection during the seminar. The student conversation shows how common sense, i.e. dominant views and practices, actually serve to reinforce oppressive ideas.

Bringing up the topic of either sex or gender in a common-sense discussion, may actually reinforce the binary gender discourse and dominant stereotypes. Merely uttering either the word sex or gender may start the difference-creating process. Larsson (2001) demonstrates how this is done, in his study of how gendered subjects of sport are created. When coaches

discuss the young people that they are training, they describe them in a nuanced and balanced way until the topic of gender is introduced. Then the talk shifts and the coaches make use of the binary division, homogenising boys and girls and bringing up gender stereotypes.

In teacher education, students are often encouraged to reflect. Through self-reflection and seminar discussions, teacher students learn to reflect on their lesson planning and classroom experience. Yet, as Kumashiro (2009) points out, the reflections often remain at a shallow level when it comes to notions that we take for granted. Therefore, the commonsensical definitions of good teaching that often are encouraged in teacher education, support a status quo that oppresses certain groups and brings privileges to others.

Conclusion

Swedish working life researcher, Eva Amundsdotter, has shown that the first step in challenging the gender order is to induce it. This, she claims, is often a lengthy process which needs perseverance, patience and continuity (Amundsdotter 2010). For a process of induction to begin, educational settings must incorporate room for reflexivity. In our first example with Nils, his authoritative stance and our silence shoved reflexivity through the door. Writing from the standpoint of critical pedagogy, bell hooks (2010:22) has stated: 'When students are fully engaged, professors no longer assume the sole leadership role in the classroom. Instead, the classroom functions more like a cooperative where everyone contributes to make sure all resources are being used [...]'. In the case with Nils, we all contributed to maintain his position as sole leader (cf. Martinsson 2006), thus hindering reflexivity.

In our next example, the setting was more dialogical, i.e. the power relation between educator and students was not as fixed. Although this allowed for conflicting ideas, gender issues were treated at a common-sense level, thus escaping scrutiny.

In this article we have found that reflexivity is a key factor for gender issues to be managed properly. It seems like interaction is often mistaken for reflexivity in teacher education. Allowing students to air their opinions does not necessarily mean that the gender order is challenged. As mentioned above, putting gender on the curriculum can actually be counterproductive if teacher educators do not have enough resources (e.g. time, continuity, competence) to manage the issue, and if students' own values and beliefs are not challenged.

Teacher educators can certainly both sustain and challenge the gender order. Pedagogies of social justice, such as critical pedagogy or transformative learning, stress the need for interaction between educators and students (e.g. hooks 2010; Wilhelmson 2005). Although this is a sympathetic idea, there

are no guarantees that interaction in itself can challenge the gender order. A group can be a progressive force, but it can also turn into a mob. Building on what we have seen in our study, it is imperative that educators have a lot of knowledge when it comes to gender issues, as well as having time and space to delve deep into the subject matter. They, as well as the students, need to be able to challenge their own values and beliefs. Quoting bell hooks again: 'Classrooms cannot change if professors are unwilling to admit that to teach without biases requires that most of us learn anew, that we become students again' (hooks 2010:31).

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Neoliberal Market Imperative in the Name of Gender Equality: Constructions of Gender in the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise

Ulrika Jansson

Gender equality – in the name of the market

Swedish gender equality politics, aim to change different forms of power relations between women and men. Unequal power structures between the sexes are presumed to be the reason why we, as one of the world's most gender egalitarian countries, still cannot guarantee equal rights for both women and men, whether it involves the labour market or other parts of life. Increased gender equality is something that everyone supports – the norm is strong and Sweden is often considered a forerunner when it comes to these issues. The Swedish employers' organisation, the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise¹ (henceforth referred to as the CSE), also promotes equality between women and men. For many years, the organisation has been one of the most influential creators of public opinion in Sweden and issues regarding increased gender equality have been on the agenda since the start in 2001. The CSE is the main business representative in Sweden and thus, its primary aim is to promote entrepreneurship and the market economy. Gender equality is presented as a potential for the economy, but at the same time it is conditioned to the delivering of value and increased profit – what is described as the fundamental role of an enterprise. As a political goal, however, gender equality is presented as a problem. Gender balance, i.e. an equal number of women and men, would according to the CSE jeopardise the entire system of the market economy. In the article *Företagandet gynnas av jämställdhet, inte könsbalans* (Business benefits from gender equality, not gender balance), Cecilia Nykvist and Håkan Eriksson from the CSE write:

We who support a market economy and an open society are reasonably in agreement that the fundamental role of businesses is to organise production and distribution of goods and services, and that the goal of the businesses is to deliver value to customers and

1. The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise was founded in 2001 through a merger between the Federation of Swedish Industry and the Swedish Employer's Confederation (SAF). The organisation represents around 55 000 businesses that are organised in 50 industrial and employer federations. The members provide employment to more than one and a half million people (www.svensktnaringsliv.se).

owners. The ability to create this value is the fundamental condition of entrepreneurship. But it is also the foundation for a prosperous society. It is only profitable businesses that have the ability to produce goods, services, investment returns, work opportunities, tax basis and welfare. In addition, it is something which businesses are better at than anyone else in society. Thus, it is the fundamental activity of the businesses which make up their primary public usefulness. Businesses must comply with laws and good ethics, which, among other things, demands that everyone is treated equally. However, the primary goal of businesses can never be to deliver political results. The activity of businesses must always be to deliver value – and that also applies to issues of gender equality. The entire economic system is built upon this driving force, where competition between businesses results in the one who does not deliver enough value getting a less attractive position in the market. And in the long run risks being cut off completely.

It is interesting to study the CSE, since the organisation explicitly connects gender political issues with goals of the market economy. Gender equality is presumed to be both a possibility and a threat when the CSE places the issue in an imaginary world where the ‘market’ is assumed to be the best method of societal organisation. In this chapter, I want to describe and problematise constructions of gender equality in the CSE. In more simplified terms, one could say that I am conducting an analysis of the CSE’s analysis of Swedish gender equality politics in the 21st century, with focus on entrepreneurship. How are issues regarding increased gender equality formulated – in the name of the market? I also want to describe and analyse how gender is constructed in the market economic or neoliberal discourse. What subject positions are made possible? What are the consequences of these positions to how power relations between the sexes are able to change? Through a discourse and policy analysis of the CSE’s public opinion forming text production, I thus problematise perceptions and assumptions regarding gender equality as well as gender constructions. In short, the point of a discourse analysis is that the language is seen as socially constructed, i.e. something which we create together. Consequently, our knowledge and our perception of reality are also socially constructed. My discursive starting point means that I focus on categorisations and positionings.

The market as a governing principle

Neoliberal perceptions which can be tied to the market have been used in Sweden since the 1980s as a way of measuring how society functions and

how it can be developed in the best way. The previously strong faith in politics as the leader of societal change has thus been replaced with market economic principles and ideals. When neoliberalism is explained in policy terms, it can in a simplified manner be said to deal with an ideological and political shift of power where Keynesian (welfare) politics, which have been a widespread ideal in the Western world for several decades, have been replaced with economic politics which, among other things, stand for a free market, increased competition and deregulations (Larner 2000; Smart 2003). The shift is described in terms of a right-wing wave, initiated by right-wing politicians and representatives from the business sector (Boréus 1994; Dahlgvist 2003) and is compared to a virus from which it is impossible to escape (Amir 2005; Harvey 2005; Snyder 2001). Even if neoliberalism is rarely spoken of as an ideology, the neoliberal perceptions remain, according to economic historian Daniel Ankarloo (2008). The ideological perceptions have come to be seen as economic realities and facts even though they are still just that – ideological perceptions. Bourdieu (1999:45) describes how neoliberal premises have come to be seen as both obvious and necessary, through what he calls symbolic repetition: ‘Over and over, the same message is being repeated – which constitute the core strength of this dominating discourse – that there is no alternative to the neoliberal way of thinking because it in true essence is self-evident and unavoidable.’ Thus, neoliberal perceptions are presented as ‘truths’, hence they can be difficult to problematise. From a discourse theoretical perspective, however, ‘truths’ and lack of alternatives are constructions. Thus, in my analyses I intend to show how neoliberal principles construct gender and the consequences that follow.

The neoliberal discourse is compiled by many different principles which deal with everything from state ideals to individuals’ rights. These ideals vary from one neoliberal school to another, as well as between authors, which is why I – in a very overarching way – introduce some of the main principles below. It should also be mentioned that the neoliberal principles as such are of less interest to my aim since I rather want to problematise how they are used discursively in the CSE’s representation of equality and gender. Nikolas Rose (1999) would say that they are more interesting because of what they do, rather than what they mean. Neoliberal state ideals vary depending on how the extent of state influence is perceived. That the influence of the state should be held back can, however, be seen as a fundamental assumption. At the same time, the state is to guarantee the citizens’ rights and protect society from external threats. From a neoliberal perspective, the capitalist market is an ideal and something to aim towards. A free economic market is perhaps the most central neoliberal principle. In order for the market to be free, state interference must decrease and the market must take on

responsibilities that were previously handled by the state. The market model is taken to be effective and rational, as well as customer friendly. In addition, it is believed to create excess and growth. That economic freedom leads to greater prosperity is another common argument (Smart 2003; Ankarloo 2008). According to this perspective, an expanded market would also mean greater freedom for people to consume and to establish themselves in the labour market. Further, political freedom is seen as a consequence of market economic freedom, which could be jeopardised if state influence were to get too great (Boréus 1994). Moreover, it is assumed that the market is democratic, non-discriminating, and equal and that it does not distinguish between people as long as it gets to operate freely.

Another fundamental conception in the neoliberal perspective is, thus, the individualistic one. It is only as an individual that you can receive rights, and as such, collective categorisations are seen as insulting. The market is inhabited by a special kind of individuals, namely the imaginary figure 'homo economicus' or 'economic man'. Defining for the economic human being is that he/she is rational, i.e. that he/she can choose between different alternatives and pick the best one. The rational choices are assumed to be permanent and are made in order to maximise one's own usefulness. Further, the entrepreneurs play a key role in the free market. In addition, gender is presumed to be of no importance as it is as individuals that we have our rights. Neoliberals therefore have problems explaining women's subordination, since they neglect that individuals move in a power structure which contain notions of the normal and the abnormal. Another aspect of neoliberalism is that the individual rights are interpreted in terms of non-restrictions, i.e. that rights guarantee formal rights and not actual possibilities. The neoliberal concept of freedom is further defined negatively, which means that freedom is the absence of coercion (Boréus 1994). Consequently, individuals cannot be forced to do things since that, among other things, would infringe upon their freedom of choice.

When neoliberalism is described as a policy programme, it often results in simplified images and analyses of complex issues and societal problems. Wendy Brown (2006) talks of the neoliberal social analysis in terms of political rationality, i.e. as a form of governing and execution of power, which reaches far beyond business profits and other economic issues. According to Brown (2006:110), it is about governing 'everything from the citizen-subject's soul, to the educational politics and empire building'. Just like Brown is affected by Michel Foucault's theories on governing mentalities, I have also found inspiration from these. Foucault developed theories on governmentality in order to study liberalism (1979) and had in mind a collection of power techniques which aim to control and govern people and entire societies. He

speaks, among other things, about discipline as a way to both supervise and produce 'normal' individuals. Different norms and values govern what is perceived as normal and thus also what is perceived as divergent. According to Foucault, the execution of power is practiced through a number of self-governing technologies whose main aim is to influence people to govern themselves, which mean that they are made to participate in their own subordination. Thus, Foucault states that by focusing on different ways of governing, at different local levels and in specific contexts, one could say something about what should be governed and how it should be done (cf. Rose 1999).

Discursive power and subject positionings

The study conducted by the CSE is, thus, primarily inspired by Michel Foucault's (1979, 2006) theory on governmentality, which includes theory on discursive power production and discursive subjects. When Foucault talks of power he uses a relational power concept, i.e. that power is exercised and constantly present in all types of relations. It is therefore possible to study how, and with what techniques, power is exercised discursively. The power concept further relates to the production of knowledge. Knowledge is not assumed to be an independent system of scientific statements, but rather perceived as productive, discursive and governing. In different discourses, knowledge is produced through definitions of what should be considered as valid and true knowledge. Discourses can in accordance with this, be both including and excluding. Within discourse analysis it transpires how subjects are created and what practices that construct the same. Separate individuals are offered different, and sometimes opposing, positions in different discourses, which can either function as including or excluding. Depending on the subject positions that are made possible and available in a specific discourse, separate individuals can express their opinion in certain matters and not in others. Moreover, some qualities and interests are considered legitimate or illegitimate depending on the subject positions that are produced in a certain discourse. In addition, all possible subject positions are not available to all individuals, which leads to the creation of limitations for different kinds of actions. Thus, actions and practices are constituted by the manner in which they are discursively described. Before I turn to the description of which subject positions that are made possible through the representations of gender equality made by the CSE, I will briefly present how I have proceeded with the analysis.

What is the problem?

Foucault uses an analysis strategy referred to as problematising, with the purpose of studying how discursive practices create particular representations of problems (cf. Dean 1999), but provides no concrete analytical tool with regards to this issue, and thus I have let myself be inspired by the work of political scientist, Carol Bacchi. Bacchi has developed an approach or model – ‘What’s the problem represented to be’ (WPR) – in order to draw attention to ‘the ways in which particular representations of “problems” play a central role in how we are governed’ (2009:xi). In the WPR approach, all political proposals and solutions are assumed to be constructed and interpreted, as well as being creators of certain types of subjects. A critical starting point in the analysis is to ask what the assumed problem is. It is highly probable that there are several different problem representations within the same policy area and these need to be identified and emphasised. By identifying the different problem representations, the implicit or explicit propositions of what needs to be changed will also transpire. The meaning of the term ‘What is the problem?’ should be seen as an opportunity to analyse exactly what, who or which that is believed to have to change. Once the actual problem is defined, the analysis should be aimed at the assumptions and notions which shape the problem representations. What is assumed to be self-evident? How are the arguments and the required knowledge constructed? Moreover, a point made by Bacchi’s approach, is to examine what has been left unproblematised in the problem representation. What is not being spoken of? Finally, one should ask about the consequences or effects of different problem formulations on specific subject positions. The analysed material consists of texts from the CSE’s moulding of public opinion. In total, more than 60 texts – ranging from one to 50 pages – have been analysed. The analysed material makes up the main part of the organisation’s production of texts on gender equality, between 2001–2009.

Equality and gender in the Swedish business sector

The chapter’s analytical focus on how gender and subject positions are discursively constructed means that I interpret and problematise the assumptions and notions which constitute the CSE’s discourse on gender equality, more closely. What problem representations can be identified? What subject positions are established and what are the consequences? The CSE’s problem representations can be found within several different problem areas.² The most comprehensive problem representation

2. In the dissertation – *The Paradox of the Indispensable Woman: Gender Discourse in the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise – a Neoliberal Drama* (2010), I analyse more problem representations, namely notions of managers and leadership, as well as of domestic services.

deals, perhaps not that surprisingly, with gender equality in relation to enterprising and entrepreneurship. This primary problem representation constitutes the foundation of the specific subject positions that I will now describe and problematise.

The woman with equal rights

When the CSE describes gender equality, it is formulated as if *everybody* – regardless if you are a man or a woman – should have equal rights and the same opportunities in working life. In the organisation’s article, *Betrakta både kvinnor och män som individer* (Consider both women and men as individuals) (Fräjdin-Hellqvist 2003), it is stated that:

Women and men should be evaluated and seen as human beings, not as gender. The focus on gender roles is a relic from the past, with a stale collectivistic taste. A cultural remnant which should be completely annihilated from our modern society.

The organisation’s notions that women and men – as individuals – should be treated as equals and have the same formal rights, naturally appear as something worth aiming for and democratically correct. It is obvious that women should have the same opportunities as men. The reasoning is not specific to the business sector either, rather it follows general political norms about justice, gender neutrality and societal development. At the same time, the definition of gender equality made by the CSE as equal rights for all individuals is more an expression of equality between people in general rather than specific equality between the women and men. Collectivistic classifications of women and men, which make up the foundation of gender politics, are not assumed to be a sustainable division, even if the organisation at a closer look, formulates gender equality as an issue for and about women. Above all, it is about the need for more women entrepreneurs. In the report *Anställd idag, företagare imorgon – En analys av kvinnors företagande i Sverige* (Employee today, entrepreneurship tomorrow – an analysis of women’s enterprising in Sweden) (Kreicbergs and Orelund 2008:3), it is stated, for example, that:

Women make up roughly 50 per cent of the Swedish population. This does not transpire when we study the country’s entrepreneurship. Statistics on Swedish women’s entrepreneurship over the past few years clearly show that women are less ready than men to run a business. For example, a report from the CSE made in 2007, shows that the number of businesses run by men is 250 000 more than those

run by women. Out of every business run by a woman, there is close to three businesses run by men.

The underrepresentation of women in the business industry is the most prominent problem, according to the CSE. The fundamental idea of equal power in gender politics – equal rights, responsibilities and possibilities – is thus reduced to a question of the number of women. By focusing on a quantitative aspect of gender equality, the context of the business industry is taken for granted. Women should simply be ‘added to’ the already existing business. This type of gender work is usually referred to as preserving the system, since it does not challenge the gender order. According to the CSE, more women entrepreneurs would also lead to greater equality and above all, that women would escape the *glass ceiling*. From a gender theoretic perspective, the glass ceiling implies the structural obstacles faced by women with a professional career, as a consequence of their subordinated positions within organisations (Morrison, White and Van Velsor 1987). In a report by the CSE, *Kvinnors företagande* (Women’s entrepreneurship) (2004), Carolin Dahlman claims that ‘it is important that more women are given the opportunity to start up and run businesses [as it might] also be a step for women towards equality and independence’. Eriksson (2004:2) writes in the preface of the report that:

Running your own business, there is no glass ceiling, rather it allows a woman to develop and advance freely. Through the business, she can gain control over her income and bridge the wage gap in relation to men. There she is seen as an individual and not as a woman. If more women ran businesses, it would also lead to a larger recruitment base for the boards in the business industry, where it is usually important for the members to have experience as CEOs.

Increased entrepreneurship among women appears to be a solution to problems of varying character. Women who start their own business can, in the words of the CSE, avoid several of the structural obstacles. It is interesting that the organisation uses the glass ceiling as an argument to increase women’s entrepreneurship, since it at other times strongly rejects to structural explanations of unequal terms in working life. Explanations in terms of a gender power order – which is the starting point of gender politics – are thought to jeopardise the ‘good’ and voluntary work on gender issues that the CSE is striving for. In the preface of the report, *Handbok för jämställda – så ser Svenskt Näringsliv på frågan* (Handbook for equals – this is how the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise looks at the issue) (Eriksson

2005), the debate on gender equality in the labour market, which is believed to provide conflicting impressions, is discussed. According to the CSE, there are two competing ideas of what the problems are and how best to solve them:

There are two competing approaches in the debate regarding gender equality in Sweden. According to the one of them, Sweden has serious flaws when it comes to greater gender equality, since women and men are not represented in all areas to the same extent. The work towards gender equality is described as having hit a stalemate, and quick and forceful action of coercive character is needed within the immediate future in order to reach results. The second approach, on the other hand, emphasises the time aspect. Seen from this perspective, women are making constant progress in most areas of society. When it comes to women's education and participation in the various areas of society, all figures are pointing up, which shows that the work towards greater gender equality which is conducted through individual people's initiatives in cooperation with dedicated businesses, has led to Swedish women steadily advancing their working life positions over the last decades. A lot has been achieved with the help of an open debate and free choice. However, there is a risk that the advancements which have been made will not get the attention and respect that they deserve.

In contrast to the CSE's need for gender activity which benefits the development of businesses and which is voluntary, the public gender political initiatives are described as an obstacle rather than a possibility. According to neoliberal ideals, the state should not interfere with the activities of individual businesses, since they themselves know best what is beneficial. The way I see it, neoliberal vocabularies make the contrastive image possible, of the free, good, self-reliant and pragmatic work towards gender equality in the business sector, compared with coercive political practices, that are governed by regulations. A consequence of this is the notion that it is politics that impede increased gender equality in working life, rather than the business sector itself.

The woman in growth

In the previous passage, I described how the CSE's problem representation of women's increased entrepreneurship is seen as a guarantor for gender equality. Moreover, women's increased entrepreneurship is assumed to contribute to growth and to move Sweden's position ahead in the

‘prosperity league’. In one part of the problem representation which constructs ‘the woman in growth’, gender equality in terms of women’s entrepreneurship will thus concern growth. The report *Kvinnors företagande* (Women’s entrepreneurship) (Dahlman 2004:2), opens with the arguments that ‘increased entrepreneurship is good for growth and prosperity. If more businesses are started, more jobs will be created and Sweden will be lifted in the prosperity league’. Thus, increased entrepreneurship is believed to be not only a prerequisite for growth, but also for the creation of jobs. Under the heading *Ge kvinnor en chans att starta eget* (Give women a chance to start their own business), it is formulated by the CSE (Kraus 2007) that:

Sweden needs more entrepreneurs in general, and that means that it is important that also women start businesses. If more women were to start up businesses, it would provide great contributions to employment, growth and not least gender equality.

Consequently, women’s entrepreneurship – in my interpretation of it – is constructed as a growth-promoting reform. It might not be particularly surprising, since the strive for growth today is used as a legitimising aspect in various areas. According to my interpretation, women’s entrepreneurship as a growth-promoting reform is made possible through a market economic discourse where growth appears as completely natural. When women’s entrepreneurship is made part of a conceptually necessary discourse for growth, the CSE is also constructed as the ‘breadbasket’ that we are all dependent on (cf. Martinsson 2006). In a number of texts, the organisation describes how Sweden has slipped behind in the so-called prosperity league, but that an increase in entrepreneurship in general, and among women in particular, would contribute to a Swedish advancement in the prosperity league. In *De lyfte landet: en berättelse om svenska entreprenörer* (They raised the country: a story of Swedish entrepreneurs) (2002:7), Anders Johnson writes that ‘if women’s talent, ability and competence are utilised to the same extent as men’s, it will benefit the prosperity of Sweden’. It is taken to be fully possible for Sweden to recapture a leading position if only the Swedish people could be convinced that entrepreneurship is of great importance. The notion of the importance of women’s entrepreneurship enforces the image of the CSE as the radical engine in the strive towards prosperity. To speak of women’s entrepreneurship, subsequently, becomes a way to create mutual understanding, with the purpose to encourage what the CSE considers to be relevant to everyone who lives in Sweden, i.e. to start more businesses. When businesses are constructed as utterly important to the prosperity of Sweden, and the being of great importance to women

and men in general, a consequence in my interpretation is that everyone is made responsible for a possible failure to succeed in regaining the lead in the prosperity league. Subsequently, this means that everyone is made responsible for their own prosperity.

Sweden as a nation is, thus, a prominent image in the CSE's notion of women's entrepreneurship. A previous study made by the ethnologist Lena Martinsson (2006), discusses the constructions of Sweden as a nation and as part of a market economic discourse. Martinsson analyses rhetoric of multiplicity bound to the business sector, and demonstrates – among other things – how the imagined 'national' is used as a collective term to create consensus around issues on multiplicity. That Sweden as a nation constitutes a large part of the CSE's talk of women as entrepreneurs is, as previously noted, not particularly surprising, and in line with Martinsson's reasoning that the 'national' figures as a collective term for most of the organisation's undertakings. Women's low entrepreneurship in Sweden is also contrasted by the CSE with women's entrepreneurship in the other EU countries. In comparison with other countries, women's entrepreneurship becomes a particular problem. By presenting Sweden as a nation, as a natural and homogeneous unit in relation to other nations, Sweden is constructed as an imagined community and women's entrepreneurship is believed to be problematic. Women's entrepreneurship, which could mean a 'profit' to Sweden, thus, becomes a problem as a result of the underrepresentation. Is there a risk that women might even appear to be unpatriotic? The subject position which I have named 'the woman in growth', is constructed by expectations on women to start and run businesses in the name of growth and in order to benefit Sweden as a nation. Women are not only being called to entrepreneurship, but also to join force with the nation. Assumptions about the nation in growth shut out notions of the 'national' as an issue of citizens and citizen rights.

The inadequate business woman

The discursive starting point in this study implies that qualities that are believed to relate to women and men are not universally given, but rather a result of different definition processes and categorisations that are tied to time and space. Subject positions are always rationally organised, i.e. individuals are structured discursively through distinctions between what one is expected to be and what one is not expected to be. When women's entrepreneurship is depicted by the CSE, it is done in a way which separates itself from the ideal image of entrepreneurship. In the report *Kvinnors företagande* (Women's entrepreneurship) (Dahlman 2004:3), it is presented, among other things, that:

Women's businesses are generally smaller than men's. The majority run their businesses as solo entrepreneurs, without employees or partners. Half of the women entrepreneurs have businesses in the smallest size range, which means that they have up to four employees, while only a third of the men's businesses are of that size. Only 26 % of the women, compared with 38 % of the men, have more than ten employees. More women than men run part-time businesses.

Women and men as entrepreneurs are presented as two completely separate groups in the problem representation. First of all, women as entrepreneurs are defined negatively, i.e. with emphasis on what they are not, what they lack in or what they are missing. The CSE's problem representations of women's entrepreneurship are characterised by notions of what is considered to be standard for entrepreneurship. When the CSE expects entrepreneurs to take out big loans, for example, and constantly expand, women's small scale businesses become an anomaly. Once women start their business, it is believed to be the wrong type of business. According to the CSE, women need to start more businesses, yet, not just any businesses apparently. They need to be adapted and resemble the type of businesses that men set up and run. Women are simply assumed to be unable to live up to the ideals and demands of entrepreneurship. The male norm of entrepreneurship is not challenged and women's shortcomings are constructed as personal. Thus, assumptions regarding women's – in many ways – inadequate or even incorrect entrepreneurship, place the reason for women's problems and subordination with the women themselves. That women are presented as inadequate or incorrect has been discussed by a number of scholars before me (e.g. Holgersson 2003). Women can, however, learn how to be an entrepreneur and a business woman, according to the CSE. Among other things, this is centred in the fact that women are believed to be in need of information on how to start a business, hive off a business or gather capital (Wikner 2003). The problematic women are offered different forms of support interventions so that they are able to change in the desired direction, i.e. towards running businesses that are more similar to the businesses run by men. According to Alexander Styrhe (2005), there are two dominating themes in the entrepreneurial literature. They are about entrepreneurs being independent and risk-taking, as well as creative and on a quest for innovations. If independence is a requirement, can one learn how to be an entrepreneur? When women are expected to learn how to start businesses that are more like men's, it also means that women's 'free choice' is put in question. Women's entrepreneurship is placed in an order which entrepreneurs, at the same time, are assumed to be separated from,

and an order which is marked by men. That the concepts 'entrepreneur' and 'entrepreneurship' have male characteristics and above all, are associated with men, has been raised by several scholars for many years (e.g. Holmquist and Sundin 2002; Ahl 2002). Entrepreneurship is, thus, linked to a stereotypical description of entrepreneurs, marked by men, who with force are always capable and willing to take risks. These notions reappear in the CSE's problem representations, which makes the construction of 'the inadequate business woman' possible. Furthermore, the neoliberal image of the utterly important entrepreneur is upheld.

The public woman

'The public woman' is constructed through notions of the public sector as both a threat and an opportunity. On the one hand, the public sector is depicted as too big, ineffective and incorrectly governed, which in combination construct it as problematic. On the other hand, the public sector provides an opportunity to women if public services are carried out by private businesses. In the CSE's report, *Kvinnors företagande* (Women's entrepreneurship) (Dahlman 2004:6), it says that 'an important reason why so few women start up businesses, is the encompassing public sector, which has become the workplace for women, but which to a great extent is governed by politics.' In the CSE leaflet, *Ett jämställt arbetsliv* (A gender equal working life) (2005), it is stated that 'it is important that women are given the opportunity to start up and run businesses. In line with this, the industries where a lot of women have their work experience must be opened up to competition and private businesses. Today, the public sector has more or less monopoly on these areas of work.' Consequently, the CSE places a private and growth-promoting sector in opposition with a non-productive and politically governed public sector. If the public sector is opened up, i.e. deregulated and reformed, it could thus create opportunities for women's entrepreneurship. Subsequently, it is believed that women's competence would be used in a better way, and this way the business sector would also develop. The private sector is depicted as a desirable ideal in comparison with the public sector; the ugly sister (Csarniawska 1995). In *Vägar till ökad jämställdhet i svenskt näringsliv* (Ways towards increased gender equality within the Swedish business sector), the economist Magnus Henrekson writes that decreasing the number of services within the public sector which are carried out by the public sector, and increasing the number that are carried out by private businesses is probably one of the more effective ways to increase gender equality when it comes to entrepreneurship. In the CSE report, *Upprop för tillväxt* (Appeal for growth) (Kling 2009:27), it says that:

Women make up a large proportion of the workforce, especially in the public sector. Entrepreneurship within education and health care, for example, would mean that women's competence and driving force are better utilised. Subsequently, these areas would also develop more rapidly and become adjusted to consumer needs.

In the CSE's problem representation of enterprising women, the notions reappear that it is the private business sector which develops and steers society in the right direction, i.e. forward. At the same time, the public and politically governed sector is not believed to contribute to the construction of society or the economy. To place the private business sector in an oppositional position with the public sector is a neoliberal approach, although it is not specific to neoliberals to do so. The dichotomy reappears in large parts of political thought (Boréus 1994).

Thus, on the one hand, the CSE's problem representations of women's entrepreneurship offer an opportunity for women to work in the 'same private market' as men, yet on the other hand, it is still in the public sector that women are expected to start businesses since it is where their experience lie. For example, the CSE does not encourage women to start businesses within sectors that are traditionally associated with men, which is why the distinction between the areas in which women and men start businesses can be maintained. Women will continue to be associated with the public sector and men with private enterprises, with all the implications it has on wages, status differences and so on. The gender secularisation in the labour market is not likely to be abolished by private solutions in the labour market. This subject positioning is, thus, also about the fact that the market does things better and more efficiently. As long as the market gets to operate freely, without the creation of monopolies, it is believed that it is able to offer women as entrepreneurs greater freedom. According to my opinion, it is once again with the purpose of increasing the entrepreneurship in Sweden that women are positioned as public women.

The neoliberal woman

Thus far, I have described how gender is constructed in a neoliberal discourse, by describing and analysing the subject positions that constitute the CSE's problem representations of gender (in)equality with focus on entrepreneurship. The starting point of the CSE's problem definitions, as in public gender politics, is that everyone – both women and men – is entitled to the same rights and opportunities. As I have shown, the CSE's gender discourse is not explicitly about everyone, but about women. Gender equality is also assumed to be something for women. I, on the other hand, claim that the consequences

of the CSE's gender discourse legitimise and reproduce a neoliberal order which confirms the gender power order, rather than challenges it. What are the effects of women being assigned meaning through neoliberal principles and assumptions – in the name of gender equality? The ambition with this final part is to say something comprehensive about the notions and assumptions that position women as neoliberal subjects. A central starting point for my analysis is that subject positions are to be seen as a result of discursive power. Power creates particular discursive subjects (and practices) which are rationally established, i.e. they obtain meaning in relation to something else. In relation to what, does the neoliberal woman obtain meaning, and how does it affect the possibilities to change the gender power order?

Differences and regulation

According to the CSE, increased gender equality can only be achieved by addressing people as individuals. The organisation explicitly distances itself from collectivistic qualifiers, which are regarded to constitute an obsolete division in a modern approach for gender equality, striving forward. At the same time, my analyses show that it is the representations of the category of women that are used to describe (in)equality. It is, above all, women who are assumed to have certain qualities and abilities which mean that they cannot measure themselves with others in the 'market', or live up to the requirements of the 'market'. Women are constructed as problematic and divergent in a number of ways. However, women do not diverge from just any individuals – but from men as a collective. Women as a group are separated from men as a group by a number of differentiating categorisations, and both groups are assumed to be different and make different types of choices. Differences are something supposedly positive in the CSE's representation of gender. 'Every individual is unique – no entrepreneur is like the other', says Peter Johansson from the CSE (2001:20). To utilise different types of competence and experiences is presented as the most important factor for a gender equal business sector. All differences are not, however, equally as good. For example, when women start up businesses as a side-line or choose not to employ anyone, then it is not a favourable difference. However, like I discussed in relation to 'the inadequate business woman', women can learn how to start up the 'right' kind of business. It is in comparison with men's entrepreneurship that women's entrepreneurship is defined as an anomaly. And it is in comparison with men as entrepreneurs, that women as entrepreneurs are believed to lack in certain characteristics which should mark an entrepreneur, e.g. courage and a willingness to take risks.

According to my interpretation, the neoliberal woman is a regulated woman. A fundamental idea in the CSE's gender discourse is that women

need to change. In a neoliberal perspective, individuals are expected to be autonomous, i.e. it is assumed that they are independent and self-determined. Autonomous individuals make independent choices. Choices that in addition are rational; every individual is expected to determine what choices are best suited to their purpose. The market is believed to facilitate for women to be what they are – free individuals – however, at the same time women become less free as their actual choices are questioned. The subordination ‘co-exists with an ideology which advocates freedom of choice and formal opportunities for women’ (Holgersson 2003:25). According to Rose (1999), the core in neoliberal governing is to produce and constitute subjects who believe that they are free to make the choices they want. In order for women’s choices to be considered rational and desirable, their choices have to be governed to be more like men’s. The responsibility for women’s subordination is, thus, placed with the women themselves, which is not a novel thought, yet it is an interpretation of the CSE’s material. Several others have pointed this out previously, e.g. Cecilia Åse (2000:9), who says that: ‘To place the cause of oppression with the oppressed ought to be a preeminent power tool, since it not only makes the oppressed responsible for their own oppression, they are also made to feel guilty about it.’ ‘The neoliberal woman’ is left with little space for independent choices, at the same time as unequal relations are defended and legitimised with reference to individuals’ autonomy. From this starting point, the gender power order appears as natural and as a result of choices made by separate individuals, rather than as a consequence of power relations between women and men.

‘Marketplace Man’

The male norm in the CSE’s discourse on gender equality and entrepreneurship, is obvious from a gender theoretical perspective. At the same, men are not referred to in terms of gender. They are just there – like an unproblematised yardstick by which to be measured against. Thus, it is in comparison with men that ‘the neoliberal woman’ becomes different and receives a status as divergent, which I also stated above. It should be noted though, that it is not just any type of men which constitute the entrepreneurship collective. In the CSE’s representation of entrepreneurship, it is a rather specific group of men that emerges. They are constructed as a remarkably homogenous group. One could say that one entrepreneur is like the other. Michael Kimmel (1994:123) describes ‘the manliness of the marketplace’:

Marketplace Man derived his identity from his success in the capitalist marketplace, as he accumulated wealth, power, status. He was the urban entrepreneur, the business man. Restless, agitated, and

anxious, Marketplace Man was an absentee landlord at home and an absent father with his children, devoting himself to his work in an increasingly homosocial environment – a male-only world in which he pits himself against other men. His efforts at self-making transform the political and the economic spheres [...]

Even if Kimmel provides a retrospective view, it can be said that the image of the manliness of the marketplace still exists. Men are appointed with the sought-after characteristics, competence and experience, and a hierarchisation is built into the gender constructions, which result in men still being passed as normal, in accordance with the reproducing power of the gender order. Subsequently, the gender power order is not challenged by ‘the neoliberal woman’.

Market in the name of gender equality

We have a strong gender discourse in Sweden and it is therefore difficult not to be in favour of gender equality. The CSE cannot disregard women either – they have to make room for them. My analysis has shown why women are perceived as essential to the CSE. Women are predominantly positioned as a condition to increase entrepreneurship. For example, the CSE believes that if the public sector were privatised and exposed to competition, women would be ‘freed’. In other words, it would facilitate the starting up of businesses for women. The CSE’s constructions of share-based representations should also be understood as a consequence of their assumptions regarding the central role of entrepreneurship when it comes to growth and societal development. Gender equality is believed to benefit increased entrepreneurship among women. In relation to ‘the neoliberal woman’, I also discussed how neoliberal ideals on deregulations etc., place a private and growth-creating sector in opposition with a public sector that is non-productive and politically governed. Thus, the way the problem is presented by the CSE, it is the market which should facilitate for women’s entrepreneurship. The representation regarding the assumed superiority of the market has been recurrent in several of my analyses. The neoliberal woman is a woman in the market and not in the state. Consequently, the market is contrasted with the state-run, the public, and the political. As I have previously stated, it is not a specifically neoliberal approach, but the message remains the same. The market does things better. Furthermore, certain variations of gender equality are perceived as counterproductive, in that they obstruct the primary activity of Swedish businesses, i.e. to create and deliver value to customers and owners in order to build a prosperous society. This way, the CSE explicitly distances itself from political directives

on gender equality with reference to the fact that they are not compatible with market economic principles. There is an additional dimension to the market doing things better. A characteristic feature in neoliberalism – and of the CSE – is to present political solutions as apolitical. The CSE dismisses research which has been conducted in gender political contexts, at the same time as the organisation's investigations are assumed to be relevant and 'true'. It is only the needs of the business sector itself that can found a basis for gender equality work. Neoliberal, apparently necessary, demands on market solutions in the name of gender equality lead to power and knowledge being merged together. 'The neoliberal woman' is produced in a discourse which excludes gender political initiatives, but which nevertheless includes neoliberal and political solutions.

It may look like the CSE talks a lot about gender equality, however, that is not the case. Rather, it talks of reduced taxes, new tax regulations, just social insurance and so on. In essence, it is not the market which impedes entrepreneurship; it is the tax system and complicated regulations which restrict it. To label the market as the best form of societal organisation, not only includes a description of the way it functions, but also an evaluation of the imaginary world that it entails. The CSE's problem representations of gender equality are about creating conditions for societal support and legitimacy in order to strengthen the organisation's representation of reality – the image of the market as inevitable and necessary. Women need to be included in their capacity as women, since the 'market' needs different types of competence, abilities and experiences in order to expand and create growth. At the same time, women are not admitted into the 'market' in the capacity of being different as women. It is essential that they change to fit into the manly standardised 'market'. Thus, women are not required in the 'market' as women – but rather in order to legitimise a neoliberal order, which I have stated earlier. The way that the CSE formulates the gender equality 'problem' does not challenge the gender power order at its core, and thus, the notion that the 'market' is non-discriminating, falls short.

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Part III.
Gender equality in theory and practice

The (dis)Similarity Paradox in Swedish Integration Policies: The Case of Immigrant Women as Templates

Lena Grip

I have been active in this association for 13 years and they always think we are, they make us a social burden. They do not want us to be able, unfortunately, government agencies, local authorities, all, they think, they do not want us to stand on our own.

This is an excerpt from an interview with a woman who is active in an international women's association, who, like one of out of many, was interviewed during my doctor's thesis in 2005–06. She was born in Iran but immigrated to Sweden over 20 years ago. She has been active in the association for many years, an association which organises women with different nationalities and backgrounds. She says that she has seen many women come and go through the doors of the association, and that she has experienced a lot of times where the local authorities do not see to women's needs in their integrative efforts. I am told that women who had power, will and status before they immigrated to Sweden are drained of energy from the treatment they receive from the local authorities. This despite the fact that the purpose of present day policies of integration in Sweden imply equal rights, obligations and possibilities, as well as rights to be included in society.

Research on ethnic discrimination in Sweden shows that there exists a systematic subordination based on categorisations of ethnicity, race and 'immigrationship' (see Molina, Mulinari and De los Reyes 2003; Lindberg 2002). But research also shows that immigrant women are treated and discriminated against in specific ways. The combination of different categorisations, e.g. gender and ethnicity, creates specific forms of gendered practices. A questionnaire given to Swedish local authorities regarding their introduction for immigrants shows, among other things, that men participate in the introduction to a greater extent than women, they engage in various types of social activities as well as reach the purposes of the introduction to a greater extent than women, and also receive more labour practice than women (Integrationsverket 2002, 77). Other surveys show that such labour-related activities and projects will vary depending on whether they are directed to a woman or a man, and that men and women are also treated differently in the integrating activities of local authorities. For example, women with a foreign

background are more often placed in projects that revolve around traditional female tasks, such as cooking, sewing and conversational activities. Men with a foreign background are more likely to take part in projects that provide computer training (Thomsson et al. 1999, 31; Lundstedt 2005). Research also shows that immigrant women are often very dissatisfied with the various projects they are placed in. They do not think that the projects focus on such things as labour demand, and feel that their own ideas regarding their need for education and training, are greatly ignored (Thomsson and Hoflund 2000, 103ff).

Study on local gender integration policies and practices

With an interest in the specific ways that immigrant women meet Swedish society and local authorities, and with questions of how policies are turned into practice and how integration is conducted at a local level, I did a study on Swedish integration policy between 2005 and 2010. Within these bigger questions, the study had a focus on how negotiations on similarities and differences are being held in the example of integration policies, with a special focus on immigrant women's situation.

The study looked at four medium-sized, Swedish municipalities, on the basis that local authorities have great discretion to determine how the national objectives should be formulated and implemented at a local level. It is also in the municipalities that the national objectives are to be translated into concrete actions, and it is here that the financial frameworks for those actions are determined.

Interviews were conducted in the four municipalities with politicians and officials with responsibility and knowledge about the integration policy, as well as with immigrant women in various associations and organisations. There has been a lack of research focusing on immigrant women's organisation in associations with an interest in their experiences, and this lack met well with my own interest to meet women who were in active contact with local authorities. This is why the choice fell on immigrant women who are active in associations and organisations. The associations in this study can be divided in two different categories: international women's organisations and sections for women in bigger ethnical organisations. Women who are active in the selected organisations represent different origins from different parts of the world, as well as different experiences of their immigration to Sweden, based on the time of and the reason for immigration. The immigrant women in this study therefore cover a big spectrum of experiences and also motives for organising/involving themselves in associations. Studies of various municipal records related to integration policy were also made.

The everyday practice

To understand local policies on integration, and immigrant women's position in Swedish society, theories that combine local and global as well as gendered and racialised processes, have high explanatory value. Through different actions in the local municipality in combination with national and global processes and conceptions, representations and templates of immigrant women are shaped. Representations and templates that may impact how they are perceived in the local community and how local authorities form policies and practices of integration.

Templates in this sense imply 'repetitive, simplified formulations' and are created to 'facilitate different kinds of pattern creations' (Grenholm 2005, 82, own translation). The template is a model or pattern that routinely mass-produces a simplified notion, just like Haldrup, Koefoed and Simonsen's (2006, 176) *banal Orientalism*, which is an 'everyday thinking [...] naturally appearing daily in the words of politicians, in media coverage and in the way the dominant discourse is circulating in everyday narratives'. The template is made up by stereotypes and stereotype perceptions, e.g. who counts as Swedish and who does not. Grenholm states that a template needs tension to stay alive, why templates have to be simplifications to form a common way to understand and talk about things (2005, 85, 90). However, that the templates are simplifications does not necessarily mean that they have no basis in reality, but they are built on divisions of 'us' and 'them', the known and the unknown; simplified understandings that are just as easy to duplicate as painting stencils for decorating a wall.

Conceptions regarding similarities and differences on the basis of gender and ethnicity in an imagined Swedish space, but also in more local spaces, have been central for an understanding of the studied phenomena, given that at the core of an integration policy lie differences that need to be integrated. Several studies also show that conceptions of Swedishness and otherness, similarity and difference, permeate the Swedish integration debate, policy and rhetoric (see e.g. Boréus 2006; Mattsson 2001). In this study, the conceptions are neither considered eternal nor static, but as depending on a daily reproduction and renegotiation. It is also the daily reproduction that gives them their 'natural, self-evident, *taken-for-granted* global moral order' (Haldrup, Koefoed and Simonsen 2006, 175). Through daily meetings, conceptions about others take on new forms and meanings and Haldrup et al. (2006, 174) argue that the banal Orientalism expresses itself in everyday physical meetings, which also shape local spaces and local spatial practices. In these everyday practices that divide people in 'us' and 'them', it is also clear that notions of gender are meaningful. The body as a material fact and interpretations of the body's various meanings seem to be

meaningful in how local integration policies and practices are worked out, and these ideas are not gender neutral.

The immigrant woman as a template

The image of *the immigrant woman* among politicians and officials in the scope of this study varies somewhat, but some features recur frequently. The recurrent features shape templates, like reproduced conceptions routinely applied on different situations and examples. The content of this template(s) is interesting because it may be one explanation to the policy and conducted practice in the municipalities. This study shows that the template of the immigrant woman is built on notions of a particular type of immigrants. It is mainly women from countries that are linked to the idea of 'culturally distant' communities (see Mattsson 2001) that are described in the interviews. The picture is painted with large, stereotyping brush strokes, where the entire imagined group is characterised by one stroke.

Examples of how the image of the immigrant woman is formed, shows in the following narrative by a local councillor:

Most women who come here from all those countries that we are talking about – Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia – they have no education, and for the most part they cannot read. I know that they say, like, they do not know that the world is round. It is on that level huh. If you show a globe, and you point out Sweden and Somalia, that is the level you must keep it at, eh.

In the quote, Muslim countries are used as examples to demonstrate that these women often are an unskilled group who come from countries spatially distant from Sweden. The quote also states that these women are uneducated and completely ignorant about the world they live in. This is a description that produces and reproduces the template of immigrant women.

This notion of people from other parts of the world, that they are uneducated and ignorant, is a part of the construction of an 'us' and 'them' that can be traced back to colonial times and further back (see e.g. Haldrup, Koefoed and Simonsen 2006; Eriksson, Eriksson Baaz and Thörn 1999), where the own group is represented as superior to others through, e.g. education and knowledge, which also entitles and obligates enlightenment.

When respondents in this study speak *about* women who have immigrated to Sweden, the picture of 'an immigrant woman' that emerges is that she is a Muslim, that she is isolated in her home, responsible for home and family matters, has little or no education, has little experience of work, is not comfortable when men is around, and that her husband (or another

man) is controlling her. These are descriptions that appear several times in different ways. In some interviews all these characteristics are used in the same sentence, but in some just one or two of them are used. Together they form a whole picture and provide the template with its content. The picture painted in this study is similar to results in several previous studies (e.g. Thomsson et al. 1999; Lundstedt 2005; Thomsson 2003; Wikström 2007). This shows that there is a coherent template, formed by several different stories of immigrant women.

Swedishness and gender equality as standards for production of dissimilarity

Next to the description of the immigrant woman, there is a representation of Sweden. Sweden and 'the Swedish' are described as something fixed, something obvious that does not need to be explained further. It is presented as something that everyone knows and understands the content of. Examples are the use of terms in Swedish like '*The Swedish culture*', '*The Swedish society*', '*The Swedish food*' or '*The Swedish attitude towards gender equality*'. Through narratives like '*The Swedish culture*', a taken-for-granted inclusion of some, and exclusion of others, takes place. The construction of *self* and *other* is, according to Joanne P. Sharp, 'of fundamental importance to national identification' (1996, 106). The national identity is produced by contrasting oneself against 'others' and, as Seyla Benhabib (1997, 28) writes, 'every search for identity includes differentiating oneself from what one is not'. This construction also 'makes itself invisible precisely by asserting its normalcy, its transparency, in contrast with the marking of others on which its transparency depends', according to Ruth Frankenberg (1999, 6). Within this lie the power and the privilege to never have to define the category itself – what defines Swedishness is impossible to fully determine, but what does not belong is easier to decide (Tefahuney and Grip 2007, 91). Some groups will be considered to belong to the national identity, while others that both through body and fact exist and belong to the city/nation, will not be included in the identity, by, e.g. not being part of the term 'Swedes'. In the empirical material of the study, the 'immigrant' is positioned as an opposite to the 'Swede' and what is described as Swedish. 'Swedish' here is the norm which 'immigrants' differ from. To be 'an immigrant' is therefore more associated with being 'different' than the actual act of immigrating.

The production of national identity will take different forms in different situations. The present study has focused on themes revolving gender and integration policies, and it is evident that this theme triggers a production of Swedishness related to gender equality. Gender equality is a recurring theme in the interviews and documents and is described as something that 'we' have, but 'they' lack. According to Ann Towns (2002, 158) there is a Swedish

national identity that is closely linked with the idea of gender equality. Towns writes that since the beginning of the 1990s, the Swedish self-image has increasingly been tied to the idea of being best in the world in terms of gender equality, and she writes that simultaneously with this notion, a more defined differentiation between immigrants and 'Swedes' has emerged.

Just like ideas of Swedishness, gender equality emerges in the empirical material of this study as a concept which does not need any further explanation. Still it is crucial for the reproduction of the templates *immigrant woman* and *immigrant man*, as well as Swedishness. This involves stating that gender equality is an important issue, and that one therefore must work with immigrants to make them understand its importance, and organise gender equality courses for immigrant men, or make demands for women's representation on boards of immigrant associations. In different ways, gender equality is marked as something naturally connected to Swedishness, but something that is lacking among immigrants. And when people talk of equality for immigrant women, this is rarely connected to the actual (in) equality that exists between men and women in Sweden, which further reinforces the image of 'them' as unequal and 'us' as equal. It all comes down to a comparison between 'their reality' and 'our ideals' (Gressgård and Jacobsen 2003, 71ff). This is a gender equality that limps and is based on *the gender equality of Sweden* as a template. Placing ideals against reality both counters a broader approach towards gender equality by ignoring the inequality that actually exists, and further produces and reproduces differences between 'us' and 'them'.

Patronising politics?

What consequences do these templates and constructions have then on practical activities and experiences? One of the narratives that recur in several of the interviews with immigrant women is that society and representatives of the local authorities (officials and politicians) have a tendency to homogenise and merge all immigrants into a collective identity. This collective identity disguises that there are individuals behind it. 'Firstly, as immigrants we have no identity; secondly, we have no gender, we have no age, we are only immigrants', one woman states. This collectivisation raises great irritation among the interviewed association activists, since they do not want to be regarded as a homogeneous group of immigrants. This involves both not being blamed for what other people of foreign origin do, as well as being treated as individuals in the local authorities' introductory courses and immigrant policies.

In the interviews with women from different associations, another recurring story is that society does not want to see that immigrants - and

especially immigrant women – can be quite strong persons. ‘Authorities want to feel sorry for immigrant women’, women from the associations tell me. A woman who is active in an international women’s association states that:

If you are an immigrant woman and go to an authority, firstly, everybody should feel sorry for you, why? [...] You should preferably be quiet and mistreated and really pity for you. And you should ideally be illiterate also. But they are not so many [...] Women who have absolutely no will - it is the image society has and want to have.

Women in the interviews state that because of the approach that immigrant women face in Sweden, all their power of initiative is taken away and there is nothing left for them but pity. ‘Nobody wants to see strong women’ several said, and the women who are active in associations describe that several of the problematic situations in the local integrative activities are about the attitudes and treatment they receive through their contact with local authorities.

All of these stories tell, in different ways, of the consequences of universal templates, how immigrant women are patronised, made invisible and marginalised.

Organisation as resistance

The immigrant women of this study are all very active and committed persons. They are active in different associations and have different backgrounds, yet they meet the same templates in their everyday life.

Maud Eduards (2002) has done research on the organisation among women as an act of resistance. Eduards writes that women’s self-organisation can provide a positive change in their ability to manoeuvre. Through the fellowship, women can strengthen their political self-confidence, improve their material conditions, as well as term and question stereotypical gender notions in society. According to Malin Rönnblom (2002), just by assigning women the power to act shows resistance. The organisation does not have to focus on gender equality and women’s liberation, but might also be an introspective association in order to share experiences and support each other.

Eduards research focuses on women as a group and does not discuss what different backgrounds and contexts can mean for either the women or the possible resistance. She states that some women’s collective action can be considered a *prohibited act* (2002) since the organisation may challenge the accepted rules of political practices in the sense that it questions the underlying norms and values on which the established policy is based. Different associations will, however, meet different perceptions. Some

groups of women are allowed to organise themselves, while others are met with strong opposition (2002, 11). Yet, it is not possible to predict what impact and significance an association will have. Every collective action has its own dynamics and thus feeds its own resistance, according to Eduards (2002, 149). In comparison with the present study, it is clear that the women's background as an immigrant or not, does make a difference in how the organisation is regarded by the surrounding community. Unlike what Eduards describes as an active opposition, this study rather shows an active support for (immigrant) women's organisations.

Experiences of organisation in associations

In all the associations for immigrant women included in this study, the importance of the association and the social togetherness which the association offers, are described. To be a woman and immigrate to Sweden is described as sometimes rather difficult. You may feel lost in society, lost in the language, alone, not know your rights, perhaps you have no job, no social network – but a great longing for your home country. This is where the association and the togetherness of the association play an important role. A woman in a women's department of an ethnic association says that:

[...] it is precisely this, that you come here, you are in a fellowship, you laugh together. Even if you have your own problems, it sort of eases up, that you are together and talk about your problems, and that you are not alone.

According to several of the interviewees, being part of an association increases their well-being and makes them feel happy. The association is a place where the women solve problems together, where they help and support each other. The association is by the interviewed women described as an important part in their lives, even if they have lived for a long time in Sweden and have their families and work here. To meet the other women one evening a week becomes a sort of breathing space from work, family and society – their own evening just for them. Regardless of life situation, the togetherness with other women in the association makes everyday life feel easier, I am told.

The significance of the association and the togetherness felt there can also be connected to another frequently recurring theme in interviews with immigrant women – the importance of *being who you are* and at the same time being accepted as a part of society. Several immigrant interviewees talk about the importance of finding and feeling secure in their identity and/or culture, and it seems that the associations play an important role here. It can be about

speaking the native language, eating certain foods or dancing certain dances and teaching this to their children. But it can also be about creating an inclusive atmosphere in the association so that everyone feels welcome, whoever it is. This is highlighted as a contrast to the experiences they have from the rest of society, where several of the interviewees have experienced discrimination and where they feel that they have to adapt and change themselves to fit in. The talk about *being who you are* can be both about gender and origin. As women, a desire to gather with other women is expressed, and they also express a desire, as immigrants, to gather with other people from the same country or the same experience. However, few interviewees connect the experience of being both immigrant and woman to a need to meet other immigrant women. These two are expressed as different needs.

Resistance or support?

According to Eduards's (2002) research on women's collective actions, women's organisations always pose a potential threat, but the present study shows that immigrant women's organisations do not seem to be perceived as a threat to the municipal organisation. Rather, support is given by the local authorities to these associations through additional financial contributions and other assistance. This despite the fact that – according to Eduards's theory – the organisation shed light on women as being active, and as such should be even more threatening since being active completely violates the template of the immigrant woman.

Several explanations, as to why immigrant women's collective actions are not perceived as a threat despite the fact that women actually reinforce each other, can be found in this study. Explanations which may also interact and reinforce each other. The first explanation is that the template of the immigrant woman is so strong that the representatives of the local authorities are unable to see the actual force/power of the associations. The perception of immigrant women is, as we have seen, that they need help and support from society. This help and support is given irrespective of the purpose and actions in the associations. The present study shows that the interviewed politicians and officials keep pretty poor track of the associations' activities, while they still think that the associations are important and entitled to additional support. A representative from one of the associations also states that there is a belief that only 'poor' women, or women with a veil (which is often described as the same thing), join the associations. Thus, this first explanation holds that the template of the immigrant woman is so powerful that she can never be perceived as a threat.

A second explanation, which is connected to the first, is that the template contains a conception that the immigrant woman can and needs

to be 'saved'. Here the colonial notion of 'saving brown women from brown men', persists (see Spivak 1988). There is a distinct, intrinsic value in making the immigrant woman leave her home. There is a notion that by being part of an organisation or association, she is breaking away from her family and 'culture', and this may be an explanation why the local authorities gladly provide additional support for some of these associations. This study, as well as previous research, shows that women of foreign origin who violate the template and 'knock on the door' to the space of similarity are often welcomed as a good examples (see e.g. Brune 2004). Thus, in an idealised image of successful integration, notions of gender equality have a central role. It is interesting that this violation of the template does not lead to a questioning of the template and the homogenisation. Women who move outside of these preconceived notions, are rather described as different from most immigrant women, which further strengthens the template. They become the exception which confirms the rule and an example of the good in doing things *the Swedish way*. 'Those women who choose *Swedishness* are welcome to the realm of the Same – provided that the transformation is made in a convincing way' (Tsefahuney and Grip 2007, 90, own translation). This explanation of why the collective action is not seen as a threat, holds that although migrant women become strong and violate norms, it does not affect the norms and templates, but rather reinforces them while society gets to feel like the 'saviours' of these women. Eduards (2002, 149) writes that women's collective action highlights the gap between women as constructed ideals and women's actual practices, but it does not seem to be the case with immigrant women's organisation.

A third explanation can be related to who the collective action designates. Eduards (2002, 157) writes that when women organise themselves they designate men as a collective, and that this may be the most prohibited act of all. The present study shows that when immigrant women organise themselves in associations, it is not men as a collective that is made visible, but immigrant men. Consequently, men and women are thought to be inseparable along ethnic lines, and thus, immigrant women's collective actions are not threatening to 'Swedish' men. Rather, it is immigrant men who are linked to immigrant women, and this is confirmed by the fact that the opposition to the collective action seems to be run by fellow *countrymen*. Neither society at large, nor 'Swedish' men as collective, are designated, and the associations are not perceived to be primarily organised around gender, but around ethnicity and gender in combination. Therefore, it is perceived as definite and not as a threat to current gender structures and systems in Swedish society. This contributes to the fact that this female organisation can operate without active resistance from society at large, and in most cases also receive societal support.

Another explanation as to why this collective action is not perceived as a threat but instead supported, could perhaps be found in the purpose of the organisation and whether the collective action is aimed at some sort of societal change or not. Several of the associations in this study, however, have aims that contradict this explanation, since they have feminist purposes and strive to influence politicians and change society. Also, those associations that do not have explicit emancipatory purposes and that primary arrange traditionally female occupations such as cooking, courses in sewing and flower binding, and such things - and for that reason can be considered as 'harmless' - are also critical of how society and the local authorities are conducting integration. Even those associations that do not have it as an explicit aim in their statutes, have a desire for societal changes. This fourth possible explanation therefore finds no support in the material of this study.

Spaces of similarity

This study on immigrant women and local integration policy in Sweden, shows that constructions and representations of Sweden as a space of similarity are central to the process of integration. This leads, first of all, to a division between people who belong and people who do not, often expressed as 'Swedes' and 'immigrants' regardless if Sweden is seen as a static and given space or as a society of diversity. Secondly, the purpose of the integration policy - that everyone should feel that they belong 'the way they are' - does not apply, due to a more or less pronounced idea that immigrants need to change in order to fit in. These are key elements of how integration is produced. A substantial part of the construction of Sweden as a space of similarity, lies in the question of who has access to the space and who has not. John Pickles (2004, 3) writes that 'the drawing of a line is a fundamentally geographical and spatial act in which identities are inscribed'. Identities are produced through demarcations against 'others', and this invisible line of integration is in spite of its invisibility a clear marking of the difference between 'the same' and 'the other'.

By means of various metaphors with their point of departure in a notion of something spatial, integration is construed as a movement from something 'outside', to Sweden as a space to be entered into. Being integrated, *coming into* the community is compared to entering a room or a house. This is described through metaphors as thresholds, keys and doors. One example of this is an immigrant woman who speaks of integration as *open doors* that are constantly being shut in front of her: 'I always say that integration has 500 000 doors and I have opened one, and it is not even fully open and it all the time blows back in our faces.'

It is a powerful metaphor for the experience of resistance and exclusion in a desire to *enter*. The metaphor of closed doors also describes the yet-to-be-achieved integration as a result of *shutting out*. The spatial metaphors create concrete images of a complicated process and turn integration into something tangible.

In the material of this study, the most common way to talk about integration is the concept of *entering*. It can be about entering the Swedish labour market, the Swedish language or the Swedish system and society at large. Society is described as a room you can enter if you have the right 'keys' or if you are allowed in by one of the 'guardians of integration'. Being allowed to *enter* means being allowed to be a part of the Swedish community, a move from being *non-integrated* to becoming integrated and included.

The perspective that integration is a matter of coming in/entering, or perhaps rather *being allowed in*, is even more interesting in relation to a recurrent theme in the association representatives' stories regarding the need *to be oneself* and still be allowed to feel part of the community and be accepted as different, or without being seen as different in every situation. Embedded in this, is also a desire to be seen as an individual and not as part of a large mass. It is a described need which is perceived as missing in society at large, and which is instead met by the associations. Several of those active in associations describe this as a choice of either adapting or retaining one's 'culture'. On the basis of the interviews with women in the associations, being oneself and still being accepted and *allowed into* the community is not seen as a possibility. Therefore many also adapt in various ways. This study shows, however, that adapting, whether it is a matter of practice or physical change, does not open the doors to the space of similarity. In other words, the fact that a person has immigrated at some point means that, whatever they do or look like, they will be marked as different in accordance with the principle 'once an immigrant, always an immigrant'. '[To] practice integration can be compared to shooting on an invisible or a constantly moving target' (Tesfahuney and Grip 2007, 90, my translation), why being *let in* is impossible, irrespective of what changes the immigrant makes.

But integration is not only described as *entering*, but also as *coming out* into the community, which fills the concept of integration with the reverse logic of relying on the space that is linked with alienation: the notionally isolated home. Thus, home and community are here two opposed spaces. The division home/community reproduces the classic division between public and private space, where the private is linked with women, and the public with men. This is also the case with immigrants, where women are described as tied to their homes and in need of help and support to be able to get out.

However, in this study it seems also to be a *space between* home and society: the women's associations. In this divided social landscape, the association becomes a means of getting out of the home and 'a second home', somewhere between home and the community. In several of the associations, members describe the association as a home or a place where you *feel at home*. Being a member of the association is thus not synonymous with *entering* society. Several politicians and officials express that those active in the associations are relatively 'weak' people who need assistance in 'their' integration. The involvement in associations is by several people viewed as a step to achieve integration, for example through the involvement in the association as such, but also through the fact that the women are coming out of their homes. The associations' symbolic function is to act as a kind of funnel and guide 'into' Swedish society.

Practices of difference

The purpose of the policy of integration is equal opportunities, rights and responsibilities. The present study shows that the practical activities emerging from the policy sphere rarely lead to or focus on this equality. Integration policy is then, more than anything else, a practice of difference rather than a space of similarity/equality which is the purpose of the policy.

Present study, with Swedish integration policy as context, demonstrates that there is a need to underline Swedishness and Swedish space as something specific and ideal, and that gender equality is a phenomenon which indicates a border and something from which immigrants are presented as being divergent from. The template of immigrant women, therefore, has a function in itself by pointing out a line between the same and the different (Towns 2002; Molina 2004). The template also disguises the individuals behind it, as well as masking what they are contrasted against. As an example, the inequality that exists between women and men in Sweden is neglected, as is the great force that can be found among many immigrant women. The template sets the notional framework around immigrant women as a group, and it is clear from the study how this creates a practice which will also affect the freedom of action for the women who are active in associations. Linda McDowell writes that 'it is clear that a complex set of interconnections between location, ethnicity and class position are related to gender divisions, creating particular understandings of what it means to be a woman or a man in different areas' (1999, 117). This study shows how gender and ethnicity cooperate in the production of the template of 'the immigrant woman' and how this is important in the design of integration policies and practices, since notions about what different individuals can do, leave their mark on policy and practice.

Many interviewees feel that they need to adapt, despite both national and local ambitions that everyone should be accepted as they are and be able to take part in the societal fellowship without having to change themselves. This study has also shown that this is more than just a feeling among the immigrants, and that there is such an expectation from society. This is part of the inherent paradoxes in integration policy. Integration policy is based on the existence of someone to integrate, that is, someone who is different from the majority of the population. The field of integration policy both enhances and repudiates the notion of difference and is formulated around a fundamental construction of difference (see Tesfahuney and Grip 2007). Integrative measures are generally focused on the immigrant population in order to achieve equality, however, with this focus they have in practice, if anything, reinforced inequality in terms of the way that immigrants are being treated. Although the objective of the initial, individual measures is equality, inequality tends to be reproduced and lead to further segregation.

Thus, the paradox rests on a discourse of similarity, at the same time as assumptions and constructions of differences are a fundamental point of departure for the policy objectives. Therefore, immigrants also continue to be treated as different. I have termed this the (dis)similarity paradox. By, on the hand, defining similarity as the purpose of the policy and, on the other, only identifying and dealing with differences – for the individual who is similar there is no need for an integration policy – integration policy places itself at the centre of this process. This process is also a gendered one, where immigrant men and women are given different roles and put in stereotypical templates, reinforcing the idealised gender equality norm.

What needs to be done, is to take difference seriously. This implies not trying to find ‘the true’ integration policy, but to ‘simply abandon the logic of *Unity, the Same* and *Integration*’ (Tesfahuney and Grip 2007, 92, own translation). This opens up for a society that does not build on the opposition between ‘the same’ and ‘the other’, but on an including ‘us’ built on the creative force of differences.

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With Equality on the Agenda: An Age Perspective on Swedish Gender Mainstreaming

Clary Krekula

Questions of how gender equality and age relations relate to one another have been scarcely studied. However, it has been noted that discrimination on the basis of gender and age, i.e. sexism and ageism, are similar in that both forms of discrimination are '[...] *philosophies that we find offensive and which we would expect ordinary, liberal, tolerant, intelligent people to be against*' (Bytheway 1995, 9, italics in the original). On the basis of this, one would expect that countries with highly developed gender equality would also present the best conditions for developing equal age relations and thus also be advanced from an age perspective. With the concept age relations I refer to the practices, both those in interaction and those which have been institutionalised, that involve chronological age markers and other markers relating to the same. In general, such a definition of age relations implies that age is understood as a power structure.

On the other hand, it has been argued that a quest for gender equality does not necessarily go hand in hand with a corresponding interest in the age dimension. Even feminists are influenced by current social discourses and as such cannot distance themselves from them (Browne 1998). Similarly, researchers are trapped by their assumptions about the bases of power structures such as gender and age. Because these do not derive from the same source, and have different mechanisms and expressions, this can result in taking notions for granted and departing from points in the power structures that one does not work with (Krekula, Närvänen and Näsman 2005). Following from this, it is possible to draw different conclusions with respect to the relation between striving to achieve gender and age equality respectively. Hence, there are good grounds for an empirical analysis of how (in)equality based on gender and age, respectively, are related to one another.

In this chapter I provide such a discussion by investigating so-called gender mainstreaming strategies from an intersectional perspective, here with a focus on the age dimension. By intersectional perspective, I briefly refer to perspectives which emphasise how power relations should be understood as dynamic interactions between intertwined axes of power. Accordingly, such a theorisation of social positions as interlocked, stresses that gender and age cannot be understood without including their intersections with other

positions (see e.g. Hill Collins 1998; Crenshaw 1991; 1993). In a government statement made in 1994, when the strategy was adopted in Sweden, the Swedish Prime Minister, Ingvar Carlsson, identified the gender equality issue as a key question that was to permeate all social arenas (Ds 2001:64). Hence, the gender mainstreaming strategy might be fruitful to analyse from such a perspective, since it marks an important turn, where gender equality is said to be at the core of Swedish policy making.

Because gender mainstreaming strategies and their goals are defined differently and the methods for their implementation vary between countries, I have limited my discussion to issues raised in the Swedish context. Sweden is one of the countries with the greatest proportion of elderly people in their population. Questions regarding how equality between women and men relates to age equality are therefore important to address in the Swedish context. Sweden is also recurrently described as ‘one of the world’s most equal countries’¹ and as the country with the highest amount of feminists (SOU 2005:66). At the same time, Sweden was the last country within the European Union to adopt a law on age discrimination (for the legislation, see SFS 2008:567). Hence, it might even be justified to say that it is *particularly interesting* to investigate political strategies for equal gender and age relations in the Swedish context.

This chapter aims to discuss the opportunities that Sweden has to contribute to successful work towards equal age relations. Therefore, I begin the chapter with a discussion on the gender mainstreaming strategy in general, which is followed by a discussion on the Swedish definition of the same. I have limited myself to looking at the way that definitions and goals are described in official national documents, and accordingly, I have refrained from analysing documents at regional or local levels, and I have neither looked at practices nor steering mechanisms for maintaining these definitions. Even though gender mainstreaming is partly a strategy, partly of political content, in this context, I will focus on the latter.

The strategy’s point of departure in homogeneous gender categories

Gender mainstreaming was adopted as a strategy for equality at the United Nation’s fourth women’s conference in Beijing in 1995, when governments formally committed themselves to implementing the strategy. Thereafter, gender mainstreaming was introduced in key international organisations, such as the United Nation, the World Bank, the International Labour

1. Sweden received an award as the world’s most equal country from the UN’s fourth women’s conference in Beijing in 1995 (SOU 2005:66). Sweden also ranks among the top countries in the annual ranking made by the World Economic Forum, which judges countries on the basis of equality in financial terms, education, policies and health. In 2011 Sweden was listed as number 4 in the overall ranking (Hausmann, Tyson and Zahidi 2011).

Organization, and the European Commission. Many countries have also implemented versions of the strategy in national documents. This is the case, for example, in most countries in Europe as well as Canada, New Zealand and Australia.

In general, gender mainstreaming has been defined as a strategy which aims to bring about gender equality. In the Beijing declaration this is described as:

[...] to design, implement and monitor, with the full participation of women, effective, efficient and mutually reinforcing gender-sensitive policies and programmes, including development policies and programmes, at all level that will foster the empowerment and advancement of women. (UN 1995)

In short, it has been described as a strategy to both increase women's power and change the current system (Ds 2001:64).

The background for this integrational strategy was the recognition that gender equality had not been achieved in practice despite the fact that legislation was thought to have created formal conditions for this. The strategy departed from already existing discussions that were said to have emerged over a longer period of time and could be detected already during the 1960s and 1970s, foremost in the work 'Women in Development', carried out in the so-called Third World. In response to the argument that aid monies did not benefit women, a demand to integrate women and 'women's values' into mainstream activities was raised (see e.g. Ds 2001:64; Eveline, Bacchi and Binns 2007). During the 1960s, the scientific problematising of age and gender in general, presented homogeneous categories. Tied to social movements, identity politics were on the public agenda and there were ambitions to obliterate discrimination of vulnerable groups. The various '-isms' that were coined at this time, provided a point of departure for recognising stereotyping and discrimination, thereby contributing to the proven existence and prevalence of one-sided perceptions of minority groups and the consequences that this had.

In Sweden, an integrational approach was adopted as a strategy for gender equality in 1994, i.e. before the Beijing Conference. This came about with a parliamentary bill in 1993/94 in which it was claimed:

[...] a gender equality perspective [must] be applied to all policy areas. This means that proposals and decisions must be analysed on the basis of a gender equality perspective to clarify potential consequences for women and men respectively. This is particularly applicable to

education, the labour market, business and social policy, as well as within economic policy. As such, this implies structural changes in society. (My translation.)

At the time when the gender mainstreaming strategy was formally adopted in Beijing in 1995, a debate was taking place in the academy regarding how the subject was constructed in feminist research, that is, how the categories of ‘woman’ and ‘man’, respectively, were framed. Among others, Kimberle Crenshaw had published an article in 1991 titled ‘Mapping the margins: intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color’, which problematised homogeneous images of women. This did not mean, however, that the perspective had gained ground even within academic circles at the time of the Beijing Conference. In 2006, the intersectionality concept was still described, among other things, as ‘an idea in the process of burgeoning’ (Phoenix and Pattynama 2006, 187).

The statement by the Swedish Government focuses on descriptions of women and men as homogeneous categories (for a similar argument on articulations of gender mainstreaming in general, see e.g. Eveline, Bacchi and Binns 2007). The Swedish legislative proposition refers, for example, to ‘potential consequences for women and men, respectively’, without additional examples or clarification. Thereby the categories are presented as self-evident and unproblematic. Against such homogeneous constructions of categories, extensive gender theory research has argued that a simplistic understanding of gender excludes large groups from the narrowly sculpted categories, while also eclipsing the differences that exist within the same. It has further been argued that marginalisation and the invisibility of the experiences of broad groups, contributes to constructing images of ‘the norm’ versus ‘the other’, i.e. othering (for a discussion on the concept, see e.g. Pickering 2001). A possible interpretation of the presence of the homogeneous formulations as a point of departure for the mainstreaming strategy is that when the concept was adopted in Beijing, it was also influenced by formulations and notions that had been accepted when the strategy was sketched out at a much earlier point in time.

It was not until after the turn of the last century that a more thorough scientific debate took place around the concept of gender mainstreaming from an intersectional perspective. In Swedish reviews of the field, it was argued as late as in 2010 that there was a lack of problematisations of the strategy from an intersectional perspective (Norrbin and Olsson 2010). In the debate it has, in a similar way, been argued that gender equality must be based on analyses of inequality *within* genders, i.e. on intersectional analyses (Squieres 2007; Eveline, Bacchi and Binns 2007). In studies with such a

perspective, however, analyses from an age perspective have thus far not been addressed.

However, many have emphasised that social divisions have different organising logics (see Phoenix and Pattynama 2006; Prins 2006; Verloo 2006; Yuval-Davis 2006). They share some features and are intermeshed with each other, but they are not reducible to each other. Age, for example, is distinct from other grounds of inequalities, as age positions are more fluid, given that individuals are constantly ageing, and therefore during various periods one can regularly identify oneself with more than one age identity (see e.g. Grenier 2005; Jones 2006; Nikander 2000; Krekula 2006). It has therefore been argued that inequality based on age can be particularly difficult to detect if one operates solely on the basis of individuals' perceptions, and that the dimension of age-based inequality requires specific investigations at a structural level (Krekula 2011). If the ambition is to discuss strategies for achieving equality based on both gender and age, it needs to be specifically investigated from an age perspective. The discussion above further suggests that it might require special measures to identify unequal age relations, and that these in turn must be based on specific knowledge of how age-based inequality is maintained or challenged by strategies for equality, to mention one example.

A Swedish definition of equality that makes the age dimension invisible

Since the concept gender mainstreaming was first proposed in 1995, the vocabulary has been broadly adopted at an international level. Perhaps – it has been suggested (Ds 2001:64) – it has been easy to commend the strategy and write it into documents and action plans because those who are authoring such texts do not fully understand the full extent of the concept.

Definitions of gender mainstreaming have varied over time. While early definitions referred to involving *women*, time has shifted the focus to integrating an *equality perspective*. Often, the strategy and its goals are not defined at all. Where definitions are explicit, they are not unambiguous. Sometimes the strategy is said to aim to change the agenda and production in organisations, while other times the goal is two-fold; partly directed towards increasing women's power, partly towards changing the current system (Ds 2001:64). At other times it is described as a transformation that will lead to something new and which surpasses norms based on a division of women and men (Rees 1998). Others have pointed out that the goal appears to be that women are either integrated on the basis of male norms (Jahan 1995) or setting the political agenda (Squires 2005).

The discussion above points out that even if the term is used in several countries and in several international contexts to describe strives to achieve

equality, gender mainstreaming is not an unambiguous concept. Hence, if we wish to analyse the conditions that the strategy also provides for age-based equality, we must begin by analysing how the strategy is defined in specific contexts. Let us therefore see how age relations are treated and which conditions for age-based equality that can be delineated in Swedish definitions of equality.

The forging of Swedish equality policy has been described as a response to the social demands for justice and democracy that were expressed during the 1960s, as well as a response to the demand for labour (Fürst 1999). This contributed to the issue of family life and work being given a central position in the Swedish vision of equality, an orientation that has remained in current national legislative documents.

An equality policy that is based on the primary goal of combining parenthood and work can be especially important to scrutinise from an age perspective, since it is based on a narrow conception of age. In an earlier study – on how the age dimension is treated in the influential Swedish gender equality report, ‘Because the power is yours’ (Ty makten är din) (SOU 1998:6) – I have argued that descriptions of life puzzles consisting of family and work tend to become ‘age blind’ in that they render older women’s experiences invisible (Krekula 2003; 2007). In the analysed report, the reconciliation of family life and work – the ‘work-life balance’ – is a central topic. My analysis indicates that the theme takes its point of departure in the assumption that women have young children and are active in the labour force. What emerges is an image of a fertile and working woman, and in this way the report excludes many women and their experiences. The younger woman; the childless woman; and the older, no longer fertile or actively working woman, tend therewith to disappear.

This age blindness also appears in the proposition where the gender mainstreaming strategy is adopted in Sweden (Proposition 1993/94:147). Here it is emphasised that an equal distribution of power and influence between women and men is a national goal to achieve equality. An increase in the proportion of women in decision-making bodies is regarded as one example of how one can break with gender-based power structures. The sections of the proposition where this is discussed are one of a few areas where one explicitly refers to age. This reference is made as one underscores the importance of ‘increasing *young* women’s participation in decision-making bodies’(my italics). Thus, that young women should possess political power is given as a political imperative. The same is, however, not said for older women – or for older men for that matter.

As is often noted in research on equality, how goals are formulated is important. This, along with what is defined as the main problem and

course of action, is decisive for the opportunities of equal age relations. If the pillars of these goals are age blind, gender equality work, regardless of how successful it is said to be, is an insufficient point of departure for equal age relations. Let us therefore move forward by looking more specifically at Swedish gender equality goals.

A limited image of ‘the elderly’

In 2004, a consultation on gender equality policies was commissioned and tasked with creating an overview of gender equality policies with respect to goals, orientation, organisation and effectiveness. The final report, ‘The Power to Shape Society and One’s Own Life – Gender Equality Policy towards New Goals’ (Makt att forma samhället och sitt eget liv – jämställdhetspolitiken mot nya mål) (SOU 2005:66), was presented in August 2005.

From the overarching goal that women and men should have the same power to shape society and their own lives, four sub-goals were concretised that were said to express key questions for gender equality policy: (1) An equal distribution of power and influence. Women and men shall have the same rights and opportunities to be active citizens and shape the conditions for decision-making. (2) Economic equality. Women and men shall have the same opportunities and conditions with respect to education and paid work that provides economic independence over the life course. (3) An equal distribution of unpaid work in the home and care-giving work. Women and men shall have the same responsibility for housework and have opportunities to provide and receive care on equal terms. (4) Men’s violence against women shall cease. Women and men, girls and boys, shall have the same rights and opportunities to physical integrity (SOU 2005:66).

Based on the consultation on gender equality, the Swedish Parliament adopted the policy ‘Power to Shape Society and One’s Own Life’ (Makt att forma samhället och sitt eget liv) (2005/06:155). This was the first equality legislation since gender mainstreaming was adopted as a strategy for equality work in 1994. The bill states that the integration of equality is to be deepened and further developed, and it further shows that Swedish gender equality policy is oriented towards changing structural and unequal power relations between women and men. The four sub-goals that were proposed in the gender equality report were adopted by the Parliament and are those which direct Swedish equality work still today.

In the chapters of the consultation in which the sub-goals are commented upon, the reasoning contains clear age references. In the comment on the sub-goal of economic equality, it is written that:

We propose a life cycle perspective. By this we mean that paid labour should not only provide economic independence during one’s working-age

years, but also involve economic security and independence during one's pension years. (ibid, 468)

Among the indicators that are suggested for measuring how this goal is being met, it is suggested to look at 'women's proportion of men's pension income for those over 65 years of age'. Similarly, in the comments on the sub-goals on equal opportunity with respect to work in the home and care giving, the goal on care giving covers care for the elderly, as well as for children, and encompasses both the person providing care and the recipients of care. In discussing care by and for the elderly, it is emphasised that statistics and research lack in addressing the potential consequences that increased informal care giving for the elderly could have on women's opportunities to participate in paid labour, and the effects on their health. To follow these developments is described as important to gender equality policy, and further the division of care for elderly women and men is suggested as an indicator of whether this goal is fulfilled.

In these goals for Swedish equality it is also proposed that a division of responsibility for elderly care should be introduced as an indicator of gender equality. The fact that questions concerning elderly care are introduced as a dimension of equality is important to note. At the same time, when the oldest age groups are addressed specifically, it is in relationship to their status as care givers/care recipients or as recipients of a pension. Their position otherwise is not a self-evident element in the general argumentation. This can be illustrated by the sub-goal named 'Men's violence against women'. Here we see how violence against women is understood in formulations such as: 'Clearly everyone who is exposed to violence should receive support and assistance, regardless of who the perpetrator is. But gender equality policy is tasked with working to combat men's violence against women' (ibid, 473). This formulation draws attention to men as perpetrators and women as victims, which is reasonable, given that there are statistics that reveal this pattern. That is, it is a reasonable description of the violence that takes place within the broad collective of women. However, the question is to what extent this also describes the violence that the more limited category of elderly women is exposed to. When it comes to violence against the elderly, i.e. elderly abuse, descriptions of perpetrators are not as singular and, among other things, there exist reports on how both men and women can carry out violent acts against elderly women (and men) (Johansson 2002). It has therefore been argued that this presence of male victims and female perpetrators threatens feminist models of victims and perpetrators (Jönsson and Åkerström 2004).

We could summarise the age perspective that exists in the Swedish equality policy goals as limiting the relevance of the oldest age groups to their status

of being precisely that – elderly. Beyond this they are not integrated into the discussion; that is to say that policy does not encompass them in their capacity as citizens in more broad terms.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have discussed the premises that the Swedish formulation of gender mainstreaming provides for the creation of equal age relations. My aim has been to more closely approach an answer to the question of how the central position of equality issues in policy and media strengthens conditions for creating equal age relations.

I have argued that the overarching goal for Swedish equality policy – which focuses on making it possible to reconcile work and family life – is based on narrow conceptions of age. I have also noted that the oldest age groups are only present in equality goals with respect to being *older*, and not as citizens in a wider sense. On the basis of these results, one could argue that these formulations of equality goals do not contain elements that would suggest that Swedish equality work includes similar ambitions with respect to age relations. In short, that gender equality is high on the political agenda is no guarantee that equal age relations are also regarded as an important goal.

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With and Beyond the Concept ‘Woman’: Aspects on Literature, Criticism and Feminism in the Swedish Postmodern 1980s

Anna-Klara Bojö

In Sweden in the 1980s, after a decade of tightly knotted ties between the women’s liberation movement, women’s literature and feminist literary criticism, women writers as well as feminist literary critics appeared increasingly uncomfortable with the formerly positively charged word ‘woman’. If the 1970s, somewhat simplified, can be characterised as a period where many women writers sought to narrate women’s lived experience, and where feminist literary critics worked to unearth and celebrate forgotten women writers, the 1980s was characterised by a discernible unease regarding the epithet ‘woman’ (Iversen 2002, 17–18, 23–24).¹

As the advent of poststructuralist thought and postmodern aesthetics changed the literary scene in Sweden, many women writers and critics refrained from using the label ‘woman’ (Iversen 2002, 17–18; Edefeldt 1988, 118; Franzén 2007, 161). Moreover, in the 1980s many women writers abandoned the realist and confessional prose genre, conspicuously known as ‘women’s literature’, for more language oriented, self-reflexive poetry and prose (Beckman 1997).² Speaking of their creativity in terms of literary autonomy, they denounced that their writing explicitly should have anything to do with gender politics.

The feminist literary discipline, on the other hand, is assumed to have undergone a theoretical shift (Iversen 2002, 24–25); inspired by *French feminism*, i.e. theorists Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, a discernible number of Swedish feminist literary critics in the 1980s claimed to have changed their methods and aims.³ Instead of focusing on the female writer, literary critics now claimed to focus on a textual, deconstructive analysis of

1. For a historical outline and theoretical discussion concerning Nordic feminist literary criticism, see Iversen 2002.

2. For a historical outline concerning Nordic women’s literature, see Larsson et al. 1997.

3. There are conflicting meanings within the discipline regarding the actual influence of French feminism on Swedish feminist literary criticism. While some literary theorists, like Lisbeth Larsson (2002) has claimed that the influence should rather be understood as an incorporation of French theory to the more traditional work of women’s literature, others, like literary theorist Kerstin Munch, have ventured to say that a demarcation has been cemented within the Swedish discipline with an Anglo-American sociological branch on one side, and a continental theoretical branch on the other (Munck 2002:201).

the sign 'woman' as the negative other in already existing discourses. With a poststructuralist philosophical understanding of language as not only reflecting reality, but as constitutive of it, critics sought to analyse conflicting and transcending textual production in order to emancipate, or at least temporarily lay bare, the metaphysical concept 'woman' (Iversen 2002:32–34).

However, as this article⁴ will show, women writers had a more difficult task ridding themselves of a gendered artistic identity than perhaps expected. Despite several women writers' clear nearness to a postmodern self-reflexive aesthetic, the lack of women writers in Swedish literary discussions regarding postmodernism is striking. Meanwhile, the discipline of feminist literary criticism, despite its rhetoric, found itself recurrently turning to the woman writer for legitimisation. Furthermore, and parallel to the theoretical shift which had feminist literary critics denounce the importance of a writer's sex, the great Nordic collaboration, *Nordisk kvinnolitteraturhistoria* (Nordic Women's literary history) was undertaken.

Against the backdrop of the general assumption that a theoretical shift has occurred within the discipline internationally, Swedish scholars show differences of opinion as to whether a theoretical shift can be said to have taken place. Introductory chapters and historical outlines of the period give varying accounts regarding French feminism's impact on Swedish feminist literary criticism (Larsson 2002, 126; Munck 2002, 201; Borgström 2006, 24–27; Lindén 2006, 56–64). Based on a thorough analysis of the theoretical debates, as well as the implementation of French theory in a range of literary analyses, this article reflects back on the 1980s and addresses some theoretical and methodological issues facing Swedish feminist literary criticism; the issues concerning the possibility of rethinking literature, criticism and feminism, including and moving beyond the concept 'woman'.

Poststructuralist theory, French feminism and postmodernist literature

The terms poststructuralist theory and postmodern literature are somewhat elusive, and adding feminism to the concepts does not necessarily make matters of definition any easier. As an umbrella term, poststructuralist theory encompasses several, and sometimes conflicting, ideas regarding the Lacanian subject in language, the Barthesian death of the author, Derridean deconstruction of transcendental meaning, a Lyotardian idea of the end of legitimate grand narratives and much more (Foster 2004, 596–592; Arvidsson 2008, 70–71). However, for the feminist literary discipline, at least in the Nordic countries, poststructuralist ideas were primarily introduced

4. Parts of this article is previously published in Bojö, Anna Klara. 2008. "Mellan kvinno- och "kvinna": En studie av ett franskteoretiskt skifte inom den svenska feministiska litteraturvetenskapen 1984-1995." *Edda*, vol. 95, no. 4, 325-342.

under the heading *French feminism* and through the thinkers Kristeva, Irigaray and Cixous (Iversen 2002, 34). The French feminists' focus on the literary text and language production through Lacanian theory of the subject in language, brought new aspects to the discipline. The breakthrough came with the publication of Norwegian Toril Moi's watershed doctoral thesis *Sexual/Textual Politics* in 1985, which not only worked as an introduction of the French thinkers to non-French speaking academia, but also established self-awareness within the discipline regarding an immanent theoretical shift. In *French feminist thought* (1987), Moi has defined French feminism as a concept dichotomous to Anglo-American feminist literary theory:

Where we [the Anglo-American feminists] were empirical, they [the French feminists] were theoretical; [...] If we were looking for a homogenous female tradition in art or history, they insisted that female writing could only ever be visible in the gaps, contradictions or margins of patriarchal discourse. And when we were looking for women writers, they sought feminine writing, which, they confusingly claimed, could equally well be produced by men.

The theories of 'feminine writing' that occupied the French feminists had to do with a subversive language production that worked to deconstruct and destabilise the social systems or symbolic laws which reinforce patriarchal society. Mainly turning to modernist writers like Mallarmé, Mayakovski or Joyce, the French feminists elaborated their thoughts on the subject in language and its revolutionary potentials. Irigaray's concept *mimicry* and Cixous's *écriture féminine*, are both examples of a playful deconstructive analysis that approaches patriarchal discourse and exposes its dichotomous logic that continuously render women as the negative other. Irigaray's critical essays on Freudian and Lacanian psychosexual theories in *This Sex Which is Not One* (1977/1985) are illustrative examples of such deconstruction, both in theory and praxis. Kristeva's theory of language as constitutive of a symbolic and a semiotic order, where the semiotic represents the pre-Oedipal, revolutionary pulsions and ruptures, is not as obviously linked to a feminist praxis (Moi 1985, 164–165, 170–171). Even so, it is Kristeva's theories that are most eagerly related amongst Swedish feminist literary critics.

As for the concept of postmodernist literature, it is as fluid and multifaceted as poststructuralism. Used to signify a range of literary styles encompassing parody, irony, historiographical metafiction and self-reflexive poetry or prose (Maltby 1991; Hassan 1993; Huchon 1987; Russell 1993), it is a versatile concept, to say the least. As I have taken a special interest in the writers of so-called self-reflexive poetry and prose, I have found Paul

Maltby's definition of postmodernist aesthetics relevant. Drawing on the distinction between high modernist literature and postmodern self-reflexive literature, Maltby (1991, 15) states:

In response to the perception that the 'real' is fundamentally non-significant (i.e. it does not speak for itself), postmodernist writers have developed an aesthetics of self-reflexiveness; that is, a mode of fiction which investigates the very process of signification or meaning production.

Engaging in the idea of the 'fictionalisation' of all narrated accounts of history, nature, desire, the postmodernist writer is said to 'communicate the experience of entrapment in language with much greater insistence and desperation than is generally found in modernism' (Maltby 1991, 41). The modernist assumption of consciousness transcending language is in the postmodernist era no longer viable; the subject in language is already within a linguistic system of signification and, with the exemption of madness, cannot escape (Maltby 1991, 40). This is not the place to engage in voluminous discussions and manifold arguments on the similarities and differences of modernist and postmodernist thought and literature.⁵ Suffice to say, as Maltby rightly recognises, any discussion on modernism and postmodernism needs to take into consideration the many different currents of writing encompassed within each periodisation, as well as their emergence in different cultural milieus (Maltby 1991, 22). It might, for example, be interesting to note that in France the term postmodern literature is usually reserved for accessible, or communicative, popular literature (Franzén 2002, 25, 53). With such variability, apropos the ascription of what is considered postmodern, it is clear that any discussion undertaken on the subject of postmodernism and poststructuralism needs to be delimited in time and space.

In a close historical exposé, I have studied the admittance and development of French feminist theory in Swedish literary criticism of the 1980s and early 90s, as it emerged in both theory and practice. From another perspective, I have looked at the development of a postmodernist aesthetical ideal on the Swedish literary scene, as it emerged roughly around the same period. In this article, I focus on various issues concerning how the Swedish feminist literary discipline relates to the poststructuralist reluctance to espouse the woman writer as its primary object of investigation. In addition, I raise some concerns regarding the apparent lack of women writers present on the literary scene during the aforementioned period.

5. For theoretical discussions on postmodernism, see Natoli and Hucheeon 1993.

Postmodernist aesthetics emerging in Sweden

As the 1970s came to a close, calls for new aesthetic norms became distinguishable on the Swedish literary scene. In summaries of the past

decade, and wishful prospects for the decade to come, critics tired of the socio-realistic, leftwing artistic agenda that promoted community-minded and humanitarian aesthetic ideals, and called for literary and critical change. Groups of young critics and writers, inspired by poststructuralist thought introduced new theoretical tools and aesthetic ideals to the literary scene: the new and up to date journal, *80-tal*, and avant-garde theoretical review, *Kris*, set the tone:

Late capitalist society's co-operative and flattening characteristics, its insistence on utility, reason and conciliation, is most blatant in its visions of the type of culture that some bureaucrats and men of the institutions paint for themselves. Here, art has been transformed into social technique. [...] There is an illusion that all art forms must be able to communicate with all people. [...] This art is public-spirited in the sense that it deals with the same issues as the media. [...] It is reformist lubrication. (Engdahl and Larsson 1979, 5)

Thus wrote the prominent poststructuralist critic Horace Engdahl and the distinguished postmodernist writer Stig Larsson in *Kris* in 1979, in an early attempt to flaunt the shortcomings of contemporary Swedish literature. During the years that followed, poststructuralist theories became more and more frequently discussed in the public literary sphere; between the years 1982 and 1988 there was a more or less continuously ongoing debate in Swedish literary reviews and daily newspapers regarding the pros and cons of postmodernist aesthetics and poststructuralist thought.⁶ Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, in particular, became theoretical high fashion. Studying the emergence of a Swedish postmodern aesthetic, it is interesting to note that it assumes as its springboard not modernist literature but indeed realist fiction. Returning briefly to Maltby, he has noted that in some instances it may be more accurate to relate postmodernism as an anti-realist, rather than an anti-modernist, movement (Maltby 1991, 189). Both in chronological terms and with regard to the aesthetic and philosophical arguments, it was primarily the realism of the 60s and 70s that was under attack by the Swedish postmodernists, not the modernism of the 40s and 50s.

Analysing introductions of poststructuralist thought and postmodernist

6. A thorough investigation of the emergence and implications of postmodern aesthetic ideals in Sweden remains to be done, but for a more general outline, see Burton 1988 and Broady 1998.

aesthetics to the Swedish literary scene from a gender perspective, two areas of interest crystallise: (1) the apparent lack of both women writers and critics participating in the new cultural debate, and (2) the fact that disassociation from a left-wing and humanistic aesthetic ideal from which the poststructuralists and postmodernists spring, takes the shape of an anti-realist and anti-confessional prose genre, a genre that is often understood to be closely connected to the term 'women's literature'.

The lack of women writers and critics in the postmodernist tradition is not something specific to the Swedish literary scene; cultural theorists Andreas Huyssen and Mark Owens have noted a similar void of women participants in the American and European postmodernist cultural discussions (Huyssen 1984/1993, 126–127; Owens 1998). Needless to say, the void is not reflective of an actual lack of women writer working within that aesthetic period. In Sweden, some of the greatest self-reflexive poetry and prose was written by writers such as Åsa Nelvin, Ann Jäderlund, Birgitta Lillpers, and Kristina Lugn (Beckman 2002, 10). However, it is interesting to note that the 1980s – which according to literary historian Åsa Warnquist, sees more women poets published than ever before in Sweden – should be more or less void of women poets and writers as far as the contemporary literary discussion is concerned (Warnquist 2007, 144).⁷ Moreover, literary historian Anna Williams has found that the Swedish 1980s, as it is related in the national literary histories, is more gender segregated than any previous literary period (Williams 1997, 167–182). While the passages concerned with postmodernism and poststructuralism exclusively relate male writers and critics, like aforementioned Engdahl and Larsson, women writers published during the same literary period are dealt with under the headings 'New feminism and women's literature' or 'The women's movement and women's literature' (Williams 1997, 177). As Williams rightly points out, it is highly problematic that women writers in the literary histories are discussed within parameters of gender rather than literature. As for the postmodernist women writers, the indiscriminate readings of their literature as 'women's literature', is perhaps even more troublesome if we look to the emergence of a postmodern aesthetic. If postmodern aesthetics are indeed introduced as an alternative to the socio-realist and confessional genre, including the so-called women's literature, then literary history's classification of postmodern women writers' texts as 'women's literature' is doubly troublesome, as it set these writers aside from the aesthetic postmodern tradition. Aside from

7. The 'Jäderlund debate', a literary quarrel that followed the publication of postmodernist poet Ann Jäderlund's *Som en gång varit äng* (1988), is sometimes referred to as an exemption to the general lack of gender issues in the 1980s contemporary literary debate. But even though the discussion initially dealt with issues concerning gender, criticism, and poetic language, the discussion soon took different course towards questions concerning cultural institutions and power, leaving the issues of gender behind (Mai 1993).

the generalised assignment of all literature written by women under the umbrella term 'women's literature', the 'women's literature' genre is itself a critical concept elaborated by American literary critic Cheri Register in the 70s. Cristin Sarrimo has offered a definition of the genre as an 'authentic confession relating the woman's experience' which, furthermore, was understood to be representative and communicative of women's experiences in general, and thereby gained political and emancipatory power (Sarrimo 2000, 40). American writer Erica Jong's *Fear of flying* (1973), is an iconoclastic example of this genre. In Denmark, writer Suzanne Brogger, and in Sweden, writers Kerstin Thorvall and Agneta Klingspor, are representative of this kind of writing (Malmberg 1997, 173–181). As postmodernist aesthetics are introduced in Sweden, this is a literary genre under fire. In the *Kris* excerpt earlier, one might note nuances of an anti women's literature critique as the review criticises contemporary literature as 'social technique' and denounces its artistic aspects (Engdahl and Larsson 1979). Less subtle was the critique in the literary review *80-tal* (1980, 4–6), whose first editorial highlighted a linkage between the increase in publications of women writers, the dominance of the confessional prose genre and the general decay of great literature. In one of the larger daily newspapers another distinguished poststructuralist critic persisted that Swedish literature was suffering due to its poor criticism which 'demands literary characters to represent meaty women's liberation amazons' (Gellerfeldt 1980). The examples are manifold,⁸ and the tendency clear: in Sweden, postmodernist literature is by definition not women's literature.

This said, it must be clearly stated that several women writers during this period also distanced themselves from the so-called women's literature genre; Danish writer Pia Tafdrup has been especially noted for her reluctance to be associated with the term (Bäckström 2010, 32; Mai 1993, 465) and in Sweden several authors like aforementioned Nelvin, Lugn, and Lillpers have expressed their wish not to be associated with the genre (Nelvin 1978, 244–245; Lugn 1999, 4; Lillpers 1988, 123). Being related to a documentary, confessional and realistic prose genre on the basis of one's sex, when really writing within a self-reflexive or ironic postmodernist tradition, was of course undesirable from these writers' perspective. Problems arise when literary criticism and literary historians prevail in reading women writers under the rubric of women's literature, and thereby designate them to a realm of political writing rather than to their aesthetic tradition. As Norwegian writer and critic Karin Moe has suggested, the 80s bode for either a reformed concept of women's literature encompassing the broad range of styles and genres that women writers clearly turned to, or an abandonment of the concept entirely (Moe 1986, 174–176). There are examples of literary

8. Other examples of similar rhetoric are found in Olsson 1980, and in Gellerfeldt and Günter 1981.

theorists that have made a point of relating previously mentioned women authors to their aesthetic tradition rather than to the women's literary genre (Malmberg 2000; Öhman 2007; Andersson 2010), but exempting the passage on postmodernism in *Nordisk kvinnolitteraturhistoria* (Beckman 1997, 478–492), the Swedish postmodern literary 80s goes down in history as a decade without women.

A shift, in theory

Turning to the field of feminist literary criticism, and the question of the woman writer's place within the discipline, the breakpoint for a theoretical shift can be traced to 1984, when the Swedish review for feminist and gender studies, *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift*, published an issue dedicated specifically to the Swedish feminist literary discipline. Here, possibly for the first time in Sweden, the issue of gynocriticism versus French feminism was brought to attention. In a lengthy article, literary theorist Gunilla Domellöf mapped the current situation for the Swedish discipline and noted that it was largely preoccupied with women writers and the writing of women's literary histories (Domellöf 1984). Domellöf brought to attention the alternative strategies of French feminism, briefly touching upon the concept of *écriture féminine*, and relating the ideas of Kristeva's semiotics. However, the article, as far as an introduction of French feminist theory goes, must be said to be wanting. In fact, Domellöf's idea of French feminism is inclined to encompass any aesthetic analysis of women's writing, and not specifically the French's ideas regarding gendered subjectivity in language. However, the current issue of *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift* also features an introductory article and interview with Kristeva, conducted by literary feminist theorist Ebba Witt-Brattström (Witt-Brattström 1984). Here a more thorough analysis of Kristeva's theories of the function of poetic language, the abject expulsion of otherness in dominating discourse, and women's specific relationship to language 'outside discourse', is discussed. Witt-Brattström's article gives interesting insights into the new French theories related to feminism and literature, and the discussion of women's specific relationship to language, in particular, pinpoints some of the crucial issues conjured by the new theories. Discussing the subject of women writers, Kristeva states:

There is a connection between the hysteric and language that might be said to be generally feminine. All that is the symbolic order [...] tied to the Law of the Father might be comprehended as false and shallow. The hysteric believes herself to experience something that language cannot express [...] but as it has no name it is amorphous, shapeless. (Witt-Brattström 1984, 54)

Criticising other contemporary French feminists' claim that language, signification in itself, could be seen as phallic and operating under the law of patriarchy, Kristeva expresses weariness related to the idea of women living 'beyond discourse' or 'beyond signification', stating that 'women too must attempt to acquire language and must by means of linguistic signification attempt to approach their lived experience' (Witt-Brattström 1984, 54). As Witt-Brattström notes, a view of women believing that their gendered experience is 'something language cannot express' makes for a somewhat sombre outlook for women's literary criticism, especially if the discipline is out to make retribution for mistreated women writers (Witt-Brattström 1984, 54). The article pinpoints some of the crucial areas of critique regarding the relationship between writer, text and gender that feminist literary criticism was facing as it underwent a potential theoretical shift from a woman writer centred to a linguistically oriented analysis. Rather than postulating a feminine essence beyond discourse, rooted in the woman writer, the discipline might turn to the investigation of linguistic structures and the signification of woman. It might be of interest to note that this specific article later serves as the chief introduction to Kristeva and her theoretical ideas on women and literature for the Swedish feminist literary discipline.

As previously mentioned, the publication of Moi's doctoral thesis *Sexual/Textual Politics* can be regarded as a breakpoint within the discipline, both internationally and in Sweden. Whether for or against a theoretical shift, feminist literary critics found themselves forced to reflect on their praxis within the terms of American versus French feminist literary criticism. Doctoral dissertations, monographies and articles produced during the second half of the 1980s relate to an ongoing paradigm shift (Holm 1984; Domellöf 1986; Svanberg 1989; Witt-Brattström 1988; Witt-Brattström 1991; Adolfsson (1991). How far the theoretical influences actually stretch is, however, questionable; as I have studied a number of dissertations and literary analysis from the period it is rather a question of theoretical lip-service than letting French theory permeate the analysis. Occasionally this discrepancy has been a subject for discussion in the doctoral examinations (Fahlgren 1987; Nordin Hennel 1990). Instead, feminist literary critics perpetually turn back toward the woman writer for legitimisation. Looking more closely into the works of literary theorists Witt-Brattström and Eva Adolfsson, they represent different types of feminist literary criticism that attempt to merge the two theoretical aspects of French feminism and Anglo-American gynocriticism.

In her doctoral thesis on modernist writer Moa Martinson, Witt-Brattström's aim is to reread Martinson's *oeuvre* with the analytical tools offered by Kristeva and Cixous (Witt-Brattström 1988, 116). Especially observing the themes of motherhood as a feminine revolutionary activity,

Witt-Brattström attempts to integrate a feminine aesthetic into the concept of modernist literature, arguing that Martinson is the archaic mother, repressed and expelled from Swedish literary history (Witt-Brattström 1988, 117). It should be noted that Witt-Brattström in her thesis offers a critique of previous feminist readings, as well as of the patriarchal readings of Martinson's texts; arguing that they both suffer from a repression of the discourse of motherhood, Witt-Brattström insists that it is high time the literary discipline pay attention to the linguistic specificity, connected to the discourse of motherhood and the feminine body, that Martinson offers (Witt-Brattström 1988, 112).

The theoretical essays and literary analyses by literary theorist Adolfsson, offer a slightly different perspective, which represents a recurring problem within Swedish feminist literary praxis in its adaption of French feminism and Kristevan theories in particular (Adolfsson 1984/1991; 1991; 1995). The issue concerns the adaption of Kristeva's terms *the symbolic* and *the semiotic*, which within the Swedish discipline have undergone what one might call a dislocation or misreading. The semiotic and symbolic order, which make up the signifying process in Kristeva's linguistic theory, might in relation to literary theory and interpretation analysis best be understood as the relationship between the semiotic or poetic, pulsions, rhythms, breaks and ruptures that interrupt symbolic, referential language (Moi 1985, 161–162). The semiotic pulsions in language are traces of the pre-Oedipal phase, that place or time before the subject acquires language and enters into the symbolic order. Observing the semiotic aspect of signification thus means allowing for an approach to literature (or any discourse) that also renders significant the poetic instance, the negative and unrepresented in symbolic language (Moi 1985, 161–163). It is noteworthy that there have been discussions within the feminist discipline regarding the political potentials of Kristeva's 'revolutionary poetics'; in *Sexual/Textual Politics* Moi, for example, launches into rather heavy critique against Kristeva as she concludes that 'her poetics [are] *politically unsatisfactory* [...] it is still not clear *why* it is so important to show that certain practices break up the structures of language when they break up so little else' (Moi 1985, 170–171). One could of course argue that the revolutionary aspect, the political significance or value of literature, and perhaps especially literature that breaks with a seemingly cohesive (re)presentation of society or any lived experience, is that of its otherness to society's attempt to create precisely cohesive, reassuring, self-explanatory images that conceal the multitude and versatility that is life (Franzén 2007, 13–14). As such, Kristeva's theory of the semiotic and symbolic order in language can be said to attempt to circle that otherness, and render it comprehensible (Moi 1985, 162).

Be that as it may, for Swedish feminist literary critics in the 1980s, the concept of a semiotic and symbolic order in language is almost without

exception related to a question of women and men under patriarchy, and the significance of the semiotic ruptures is related to the instance of the woman writer rather than to textual elements (Adolfsson 1991; Holm 1986). Adolfsson's analysis of modernist writer Stina Aronsson's textual production is a case at hand. With Kristeva's theoretical apparatus, Adolfsson localises a certain poetic, semiotic rhythm in Aronsson's texts. However, rather than expanding on the implications of the rupturing of symbolic language, Adolfsson links the poetic pulsions to an idea of feminine writing, and to the instance of the woman writer (Adolfsson 1991, 314). As Moi (1985, 165) has pointed out in her critique of American and British theorists Beverly Brown and Parveen Adams, associating the semiotic with the feminine is a misreading of Kristeva's theory; instead, 'the opposition between feminine and masculine does not exist in pre-Oedipality' and '[a]ny strengthening of the semiotic, which knows no sexual difference, must therefore lead to a weakening of traditional gender divisions', Moi explains. In Sweden, the misreadings appear to be symptomatic of an author-centred, literary critical approach that still prevailed. Often there is an uncertainty regarding the feminist potentials of poststructuralist textual theories, which takes shape either as an incredulity towards the cogency of poststructuralist theories: 'What's *women* got to do with that *feminine position in language* that is set in motion by French discourse?', Holm (1988) asks. Or, in Adolfsson's case, more as a confession of a lingering conventional approach: 'There is a temptation too great [...] the temptation of the Woman Writer' (Adolfsson 1991).

During the 1990's, the influx of French feminist theory underwent a general consolidation within the Swedish discipline; the novelty appears to have worn off and especially Kristeva has become a household name. But at the same time there is a growing critique coming both from within the feminist literary discipline, and from the outside, questioning the appropriateness and appropriation of Kristevan theory for feminist literary criticism. Sarrimo, for instance, establishes that 'we have taken the deconstruction of Woman as far as is possible [...] Now, what we need is once again to reconstruct subject and identity, and make for a proper politicisation of the gender questions' (Sarrimo 1994, 72). Witt-Brattström (1995, 85–86) takes an even stronger stand against any poststructuralist influences on the discipline:

The fact is that feminist literary criticism internationally has developed along with but in parallel with the literary theory which has become part of philosophy. Deconstruction put a question mark to the female subject we attempted to reconstruct in the text, [and] poststructuralism scorned our attempts to establish women's literary history.

The scepticism expressed towards the international discipline's development is put in contrast with the feminist success collaboration of *Nordisk kvinnolitteraturhistoria*. Witt-Brattström's statement is perhaps a sign that the theoretical shift in Sweden was not so salient after all. External critique is delivered by literary theorist Carin Franzén; in her doctoral thesis *Att översätta känslan* (1995), she points to the Swedish misreadings of Kristeva for feminist appropriation, as described above. Furthermore, in an interview carried out with Kristeva, Franzén pinpoints the problem of the discipline's partiality toward women writers; asking Kristeva's viewpoint on the type of feminist research that wishes to 'break with the predominate literary and theoretical canon' and which instead advocates the studies of women writers, Kristeva states that she 'does not think it feasible to establish a particular value to literature purely on the account of it being written by women. Women, just like men, can utter much foolishness' (Franzén 1994, 104–105). Considering Kristeva's interest in the singular subject in language, the individual artist's linguistic signification, her statement is not surprising. Apart from the issue of literary quality, which is always umbrageous in those instances, what is laid bare here is that underlying discrepancy between, on the one hand, the idea that a women's literary canon is necessary as a place to advance otherwise supplant literature, and on the other hand, the notion that that very principal organisation of literature might suppress the variety and multitude of women's writing. As right as Kristeva might be, it is also worth remembering the above-mentioned women writers in the postmodern era who, despite their efforts, did not appear to escape the fox-trap, which was what Beauvoir once named the female position of the Other (Beauvoir 1949/1997, 20).

Conclusion

Under the effectively labelled headline 'The well rehearsed plot', feminist art theorist Peggy Phelan has pointed towards the dangers of feminist critics retelling themselves the same old story of advancement and succession within the discipline (Phelan 2001, 20). The feminist literary discipline's journey from a critique of the representation of women in men's literature, over to an unearthing of women's literary traditions and further on to a linguistically oriented analysis of the sign 'woman' in discourse, is perhaps a too cohesive a narrative of our fate, which risks shadowing the actual work of women artists and feminist critics. Breaking up the well rehearsed (patriarchal) plot has of course always been one of feminist theory's main contentions, but we too must beware of the risk of 'entrapment within discourse' (Phelan 2001, 20), beware of an oversimplified and too cohesive story of the complex history of women's writing and feminist literary criticism. As I have studied

the potential theoretical shift within the Swedish literary discipline, it is evident that a clear succession from a woman writer-oriented research to a purely textual analysis cannot be said to have taken place, rather one might contend that the period has seen a merging of different perspectives that perhaps led to an intensified interest in aesthetics in general. One might also ask if the dichotomy between the different perspectives holds true, or if it is a result of an academic rigour in need of a dialectic advancement model (Iversen 2002, 24). Articulating our purposes and goals more distinctly, feminist literary critics might not need to discriminate between paying special attention to texts created by women writers, working with the specificity of these texts, and performing deconstructive textual analysis. The postmodern period is one example where the traditional literary histories have proven unable to account for women writers' texts. This, however, does not necessarily entail their inclusion in a future rereading of the postmodern era to rest on the premises of a feminine perspective; rather, the knowledge that any rereading of an aesthetic work and historical period will entail a reconfiguration of both texts, saves flaunting any feminine specificity. As the Swedish poststructuralists have begun to record their testimony for the future, what better than to read and reread, write and rewrite, with those previously excluded literary events in mind?

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Sexual Diversity and Sexual Rights: Rethinking Good and Bad Sex

Solveig Anna Boasdotir

Discrimination, marginalization, and violence against LGBT and intersex persons occur everywhere in the world. Violations of rights are widespread and sometimes even justified by political and religious leaders as an important cornerstone to safeguard morality and social order. LGBT and intersex people are used as scapegoats for crime, corruption and health problems and made to represent the evil deviating from religious, moral and family norms and values. LGBT and intersex persons are attributed all sorts of negative qualities connected to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. LGBT and intersex persons are furthermore surrounded by erroneous beliefs, religious condemnation, suspicion, shame and hatred and suffer from negative consequences with effects to health, safety and economy due to state, community, family and self-repression. (Samelius and Wågberg 2005, 9)

The situation for LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual and Intersex) people in the world, as the above quotation illuminates, is that most of them continue to live in a culture of silence, non-recognition and disrespect. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948 and subsequent international human rights documents most definitely do not mention sexual orientation or gender identity. However, this is gradually changing and at the moment, according to the same source as above, 'growing conceptions of international human rights law include a broad interpretation to include the rights and protection of the rights of LGBT people around the world' (Samelius and Wågberg 2005, 14).

As is clearly described in *Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*, definitions of gender and sexuality usually reveal patriarchal westernised ways of defining gender identity and sexual orientation. Most people, Samelius and Wågberg maintain, start from such hypotheses that a basis for persons' identity is formed by what sex they are and how they express their sexuality. The usual conclusion drawn from these assumptions is that these identities are more or less fixed. This assumption, however, is rooted in a long tradition which understands sexuality as located in nature. Given the status of being 'natural', heteronormativity has further been the all-prevailing norm for what constitutes sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as gender relations.

A typical Western assumption is that there is a strong connection between externally defined categories and internalised group identities. Thus, Samelius and Wågberg (2005, 15–16) conclude that in a patriarchal heteronormative world ‘human beings fall into two distinct and complementary categories, male and female. Any given person should be either male or female, and heterosexuality is the only “natural” sexual orientation, and homosexuality possibly an acceptable but unnatural deviance’.

In an article from 1998, feminist theologian Christine Gudorf wonders if thinking about humanity in a polymorphistic rather than a dimorphistic way will be equally revolutionary to human society as previous scientific shifts of the modern period, like the ones caused by Copernicus, Galileo and Albert Einstein (Gudorf 1998, 297). Gudorf mentions three fields that would most likely be affected if sexual polymorphism would become generally accepted. The field of feminist theories is the first. There she argues that the two biological sexes, men and women, theoretically have formed a certain basis for all feminist arguments towards more justice in the world. Gudorf then asks: ‘What if there are more than two sexual divisions and the borders of maleness and femaleness are not where they had been assumed to be?’ (Gudorf 1998, 296). Her answer includes that if feminism wants to take sexual polymorphism seriously, central feminist claims would have to be reconsidered. This would especially influence the concepts of *sex* and *gender*, which would no longer exist as different concepts. The same goes for the notions of maleness and femaleness – neither would be constructed as biological categories. According to Gudorf, the consequences for human rights (the second field she mentions) if accepting a polymorphism, could be that individuals would get the right to decide their own sex. This is something which the intersex society, according to Gudorf, already stresses, i.e. that those who are born with ambiguous genitalia may choose their gender. With regard to this she poses the question: ‘If individuals were to have the right to decide their own sex, would there be any limiting criteria to be imposed on their choice? What responsibilities would fall on society with regard to respecting and protecting this individual right to choose one’s sex?’ (Gudorf 1998, 297). Finally Gudorf argues that from the perspective of Christian theology, the end of sexual dimorphism would have major effects on the notion of sexual sin. Once the traditional distinctions of *male* and *female*, *sex* and *gender* become ambiguous, many traditional assumptions and prohibitions within Christian theology become impossible to apply (Gudorf 1998, 297–298).

As an ethicist and a feminist, writing within the field of Christian sexual ethics, I am challenged by the issue of LGBTI that appears in both the Swedish document *Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*, and Gudorf’s

writing above. My theoretical platform is the field of feminist Christian theological and ethical thinking on sexuality and I live in a Nordic country, Iceland, which has the greatest equality between men and women in the world.¹ Approximately two decades ago, several progressive theologians and ethicists wrote about the crisis of sexuality in a Christian context and the need to discuss sexuality as an issue of justice (Jung and Smith 1993; Gudorf 1994; Fortune 1995; Ellison 1996; Jordan 2002). Critical of negative attitudes about sex, the human body, women and other marginalized people, these theologians and ethicists challenged many taken-for-granted beliefs about heterosexuality and listened and learned from voices from the underside of history.

Today, as I see it, moving into the second decade of the 21st century, some of the most important challenges to Christian sexual ethics come from fields outside theology and Christian ethics. Different social-justice movements that draw on LGBTI scholarship and activism are calling attention to sexual diversity and the persistent problems related to heterosexism and heteronormativity. In my view, current Christian sexual ethics have not reached far enough in paying attention to questions of sexual diversity, like transgender people and intersex persons. These groups of people are still mostly ignored in Christian sexual ethics (Farley 2008; Mogård 2010; Thatcher 2011). This must change and I find some of the justifications for this point of view in the fields that Gudorf mentioned in her article, i.e. in feminist theory and human rights theorizing. The question that I will explore further is the following: *Which are the main ethical challenges of feminist and human rights discourses on sexual diversity towards feminist Christian sexual ethics?*

In the first part of my approach, focus is on the ethical contribution of a few social justice movements of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. These movements draw on LGBTI scholarship and activism that have played a central role in calling attention to sexual diversity. My main focus in this part will be on the connection between sexual diversity and the notion of sexual rights.

In the second part, I will take the issue of sexual diversity into the field of sexology and feminist theory, concluding with a discussion on the need to challenge the heterosexual ideology which has been prevalent in Christian theology and sexual ethics. My focus here will be on central parts of the 'radical theory of sex' put forward by the sexual rights activist Gayle

1. See: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-11517459> (accessed 16 October 2011). According to an annual report by the World Economic Forum (WEF), Nordic nations dominate the top of the list of 134 countries, with Iceland in the first place, Norway in the second, Finland in the third and Sweden in the fourth. When it comes to the issue of sexual justice it can be mentioned that same-sex marriage was legalised in Iceland in June 2010. With that, Iceland became the ninth country in the world to legalise same-sex marriage.

Rubin (1984). Like a number of radical thinkers in the early 1980s Rubin focused on sexual diversity or what she termed a 'benign sexual variation'. Prerequisite for her radical theory of sex was social constructionism, meaning that sexuality is always rooted in political and historical communities and thus not a biological, unchanging natural force. The social construction of sex is, however, not my focus, but rather Rubin's analysis of the complex ideological constructions in our Western culture 'whose grip on sexual thoughts is so strong that to fail to discuss them is to remain enmeshed within them' (Rubin 1984, 278). The main reason for my interest in this subject is that Rubin's analysis of the 'ideological formations' is closely linked to her comprehensive critique of Christian religion, especially its inherent sex negativity and moralizing sexual value system. In my discussion on sexual diversity in this part I refer to the late queer theologian and Christian ethicist, Marcella Althaus-Reid, making a connection between her and Gayle Rubin's critique. Althaus-Reid argues for a shift from gender to sexuality in feminist theology, arguing that Christian theology must aim at uncovering not only gender codes, but also the heterosexual ideological assumptions of Christian theology which have permeated people's understanding through centuries. Based on the experiences of the poor and the awareness of sexual diversity, Althaus-Reid's theological contribution offers valuable perspectives for a radically new understanding of sexual diversity. This contribution, I argue, has ethical value and importance for contemporary feminist Christian theology.

Human rights discourse on sexuality and rights

Western liberal political theory has long been fascinated with the meaning of human nature and human rights. Feminist theoretical contributions to this issue since the 1970s have mostly been critical, pointing out the structural and systematic exclusion of women as a social group. Masculinity in political theory, this critique holds, has been produced and presented as synonymous with rational humanity, while the feminine has been presented as antithetical to qualities of humanity, reason, culture and civilization itself (Coole 1993, 1–2). Using *gender* as a main analytical tool, feminist theorists have argued that women are not included in political and social theories on citizenship, equality, justice and human rights (Okin 1979; 1989; Brown 1988; Pateman 1988; Young 1990; 2000). In a recent book – *Sexuality, Health and Human Rights* – Corrêa, Petchesky and Parker argue for the necessity to broaden the classic feminist gender perspective of how women are systematically excluded from democratic participation in society and political theory, urging for the inclusion of groups of people who are oppressed and excluded because of their sexuality. Corrêa, Petchesky and Parker write (2008, 159):

But these feminist frames are too narrow to encompass today's multiple exclusions. We need an understanding of gender as integral, context-specific, and inclusive of men, transgender and intersex persons, as well as women, in order to correct the partially true but limited refrain of feminized victimhood – the poor-women-and-children mantra.

This exhortation of Corrêa, Petchesky and Parker is not put forward in a vacuity. Rather it can be seen as a voice of a big choir of many different non-governmental human rights organisations currently active in the struggle for the rights of marginalised sexual groups. I shall now give a short account of some significant achievements on *sexual rights* and *sexual health* over the past 25 years.

The struggle for rights related to sexuality has existed since the late 1970s and early 1980s. Examples of this struggle is the Northern-based women's health movements, which mobilised around women's right to abortion, creating a feminist notion of women's right to control their own bodies in matters of reproduction and sexuality (Corrêa, Petchesky and Parker 2008). In the mid- to late 1980s, women's movements in the South also played a significant role in the development of a context which strongly linked sexual and reproductive health and rights to both the development agenda and human rights (Petchesky 2000). New global movements around LGBTI issues, sex work and HIV/AIDS have also made central contributions to furthering these rights, and since the 1990s, various international human rights organisations, governments and international institutions have joined the global appeal for various aspects of sexual rights.² The latest move in this development has been to link different sexuality issues together in a broader framework which is called *sexual rights*. Before exploring the content of sexual rights, I will briefly explain the founding thought behind the idea of sexual rights as such.

Corrêa and Jolly argue that the idea that rights could be requested in relation to sexuality has been with us since at least the early 19th century. Important shifts, however, occurred first after the 1990s when sexual matters were infused into human rights discourses and normative frameworks and activists started to transform existing normative frameworks, e.g. 'constitutions, sub-constitutional legal frameworks, international law and human rights instruments such as UN treaty bodies' recommendations,

2. In a short article like this it is impossible to give a lengthy historical account of the development of this movement. Instead I refer to two documents, but in both of them there is a thorough documentation of the development of sexual rights. See Sida, "Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Issues in Development" 2005 and Girard, Francoise, "Negotiating Sexual Rights and Sexual Orientation of the UN, <http://www.sxpolitics.org/frontlines/book/pdf/sxpolitics.pdf> (accessed 24 July 2011).

resolutions and conference outcomes' (Corrêa and Jolly 2008, 31–32).

The UN Special Rapporteur on 'The Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Health', Paul Hunt, writes that one view of sexual rights is that they signify 'a bundle of rights that are not yet – but should be – encompassed by contemporary international human rights.' His understanding of sexual rights, however, is slightly different. Hunt writes:

But there is another view. The rights to privacy, non-discrimination, equality, security of the person, bodily integrity, health, education, information and so on are already firmly established features of contemporary human rights. If these well-established, generic human rights concepts are applied, in a principled and consistent manner, to human sexuality, there might be no need to construct any new human rights. Rather, the term *sexual right* then becomes a useful shorthand for the bundle of specific norms that emerge when existing generic human rights are applied to sexuality. (Hunt 2008)

Hunt's message seems quite clear: Sexual rights are neither new nor different from human rights, but included in them. All that states have to do is to embrace the already established human rights that are recognized in national laws and international human rights standards. That change, however, is probably not something that will come easily.

According to Ilkkaracan and Jolly, the creation of the concept of sexual rights offers potential for an approach that goes beyond identity politics (Ilkkaracan and Jolly 2007). Instead of associating rights with particular categories of people – like 'women's rights' or 'gay rights' – sexual rights, they hold, are applicable along the same lines as human rights, namely to all people. That way the whole idea of sexual rights shifts the debate from being about certain groups of people oppressing other groups, to focusing on the underlying structures of inequality. A focus on LGBTI rights makes one correctly aware of the advantages that heterosexuals have over homosexuals, but according to Ilkkaracan and Jolly (2007,10), the cause of the problem lies elsewhere: 'The underlying cause is the structures of power that exist around different forms of gender and sexuality'. I shall return to this point in the next part of the article, in relation to my discussion on Gayle Rubin. Before that, I will emphasise four points stressed by Ilkkaracan and Jolly regarding what is new within sexual rights thinking.

The first point is that sexual rights are for all, both minorities and majorities, which stresses their relation to human rights. The second point makes clear that sexual rights go beyond freedom from violence, which means that Ilkkaracan and Jolly discourage a 'victim approach', portraying

women as always being victims without the possibility to bring about change. This portrayal, they claim, is both inaccurate and depressing and can be used in co-opting right-wing lobbies which seek to protect women's chastity. The third point clarifies that sexuality is more than a health issue. What is important here is the emphasis on that a broad and positive perspective to sexuality issues is needed instead of focusing on diseases and problems. All three points lead up to the last one, which states that sexual rights include positive rights and pleasure; 'what is needed is not only freedom from violence, coercion and ill-health, but also positive rights to seek the kind of sexual relations or pleasures we may desire' (Ilkcaracan and Jolly 2007, 22–25).

As a whole, all four viewpoints show that the connection between sexuality and human rights includes a political position of struggle for justice for the sexually disadvantaged and invisible. The basis for this position is a view of sexuality that can be found in many recent social justice associated writings and documents. Suffices to mention Paul Hunt's report from 2004, in which he declares that sexuality 'is a characteristic of all human beings. It is a fundamental aspect of an individual's identity' (Hunt 2004, 15). Linking sexuality and human rights together is thus a tool to create a space for powerless and marginalised people. I will now look closer at how sexual rights have been articulated in two recent documents, one from the World Association for Sexual Health (WAS) and the other from the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF).

Sexual health and sexual rights

In a WAS document (2008, 11) from 2008, *Sexual Health for the Millennium. A Declaration and Technical Document*, it is clearly stated that several initial steps have already been taken on the road towards a global promotion of sexual health and sexual rights.³ In the document, sexual rights are said to be 'an integral component of basic human rights and therefore are inalienable and universal' (WAS 2008, 2). Sexual rights are supposed to be integral components of the right to enjoy the highest standard of health. Thus, sexual health and sexual rights cannot be separated.

According to the document, there are several necessary actions to be taken to advocate and promote sexual health:

1. Recognize, promote, ensure and protect rights for all.
2. Advance toward gender equality and equity.

3. Besides a WAS Declaration of Sexual Rights in 1999, the World Health Organization joined those initiatives that wanted to build a basis for the concepts of sexual rights.

3. Condemn, combat, and reduce all forms of sexuality related violence.
4. Provide universal access to comprehensive sexuality education and information.
5. Ensure that reproductive health programmes recognize the centrality of sexual health.
6. Halt and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections.
7. Identify, address and treat sexual concerns, dysfunctions and disorders.
8. Achieve recognition of sexual pleasure as a component of holistic health and well-being.

The conclusion of the document regarding how to achieve these goals, is that it is 'essential that international, regional, national and local plans of action for sustainable development prioritize sexual health interventions, allocate sufficient resources, address systemic, structural and community barriers and monitor progress' (WAS 2008, 8). Working on these goals is certainly what the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)⁴ has been doing and I now turn to their document from 2008, *Sexual Rights: An IPPF Declaration*.⁵

In the foreword to *Sexual Rights: An IPPF Declaration*, Jacqueline Sharpe, the President of IPPF comments on the basic themes of this article, i.e. human rights and sexual diversity. She echoes various themes of the WAS document, underlining that 'sexual rights are a component of human rights'. Sexual rights, she insists, have been denied and neglected but deserve both attention and priority. Lastly, a deep ethical concern for sexual diversity is obvious when she writes: 'Marginalized groups such a young people, transgender people, sex workers, men having sex with men, people who are gay, lesbian or bi-sexual, child brides and girl mothers particularly need our compassion' (IPPF 2008, i).

The IPPF's declaration on sexual rights falls into three parts: a preamble, seven guiding principles and a final part called 'Sexual Rights'. I will mention

4. The IPPF describe their organisation in the following words in the document: 'IPPF is a global service provider and a leading advocate of sexual and reproductive health and right for all. We are a worldwide movement of national organizations working with and for communities and individuals.' In her forward, the president of IPPF, Jacqueline Sharpe, writes further that the 2008 IPPF declaration represents the culmination of more than two years work that spanned the globe involving many diverse groups of experts. In her view, the declaration is but one step in the process of trying to meet the Millennium Development Goals of the UN, laid down in 2000.

5. As the IPPF's declaration of Sexual Rights is informed by the findings and recommendations of several UN treaty bodies and UN Special Rapporteurs – particularly the 2004 Special Rapporteur on the Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Health – it will suffice as a reference on the idea and content of sexual rights.

the first two parts only in brief, concentrating mainly on the last one. The preamble highlights IPPF's relations to former documents in the UN context,⁶ as well as some of its own. In this respect the document *IPPF Charter on Sexual and Reproductive Rights* from 1996 is of special interest.⁷ As concerns the issue of sexual diversity, the preamble emphasises that sexual rights offer an approach that includes, but goes beyond protection of particular identities. Sexual rights, it says, 'guarantee that everyone has access to the conditions that allow fulfilment and expression of their sexuality free from any coercion, discrimination or violence and within a context respectful of dignity' (IPPF 2008, 10).

The role of the seven general principles in the second part is to 'inform the programmes and strategies developed by the Federation's components to protect, promote and fulfil the sexual rights' that are specified in the last part (IPPF 2008, 12). These principles concern: (1) The understanding of sexuality, which is held to be an integral part of the personhood of every human being. (2) The understanding how the rights and protections that are guaranteed to people under the age of eighteen differ from those of adults. These rights, it is stated, must therefore take into account 'the evolving capacities of the individual child to exercise rights on his or her own behalf'. (3) The understanding that non-discrimination underlies all human rights protection and promotion. (4) The understanding that 'sexuality, and pleasure deriving from it, is a central aspect of being human, whether or not a person chooses to reproduce.' (5) The understanding that ensuring 'sexual rights includes a commitment to freedom and protection from harm.' (6) The understanding that sexual rights 'may be subject only to those limitations determined by law for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and the general welfare in a democratic society.' And lastly (7), the understanding that the obligations to respect, protect and fulfil apply to all sexual rights and freedoms (IPPF 2008, 12–15).

All seven principles, whose goal it is to lay a fundament under the ten articles of sexual rights, have a clear message regarding sexual diversity. That message concerns the importance of including the poor, the sexually marginalised and the socially excluded people. By stressing the universality, interrelatedness, interdependence and indivisibility of sexual rights as human rights, these principles hold that there can be no hierarchy regarding

6. The preamble refers especially to the documents emanating from the 1993 UN World Conference on Human Rights, the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, the 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women, the UN Millennium Declaration, and the Millennium Development Goals.

7. See: <http://www.ippf.org/en/Resources/Statements/IPPF+Charter+on+Sexual+and+Reproductive+Rights.htm> (accessed 27 July 2011).

their implementation: All human beings ought to be included. I shall now demonstrate how this is stated in the ten articles of sexual rights in the IPPF document.

Sexual rights are human rights related to sexuality

The first article highlights the concepts of *equality* and *non-discrimination*, underlining the right to ‘equality, equal protection of the law and freedom from all forms of discrimination based on sex, sexuality or gender’ (IPPF 2008, 16). The second article stresses *participation* as a right for all persons, regardless of sex, sexuality and gender (IPPF 2008, 17). The third article states that no matter their ‘sex, age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status, sexual history or behaviour, real or imputed, and HIV and AIDS status’, all persons have the right to ‘life, liberty, security of the person and bodily integrity’ (IPPF 2008, 17–18). Article four states the right to *privacy*, which is said to be essential to the exercise of sexual autonomy (IPPF 2008, 18). *Personal autonomy* and *recognition before the law* is the main content of article five. This right is said to be important in relation to sexual freedom, which however, is always restricted within a framework of non-discrimination and with due regard to the rights of others (ibid.). Article six stresses the *right to freedom of thought, opinion and expression, right to association* with regard to ideas on sexuality, sexual orientation, gender identity and sexual rights (IPPF 2008, 19). The seventh article underlines the concepts of *health* and the *benefits of scientific progress* stressing that marginalised individuals and sexual communities might need special concern and respect. In this article it is stated that sex workers have the right to safe working conditions, access to health services and necessary support to insist on safer sex (ibid.). Article eight stresses the right of all persons, without discrimination, to *education* and *information* to ensure that any decisions they make that is related to their sexual and reproductive life are made with full, free and informed consent. The right to education is seen as an important tool in exercising full citizenship and equality in the private, public and political domains (IPPF 2008, 20). The ninth article, like the fourth one, stresses *personal freedom and autonomy*, but here in relation to issues of marriage and family. All persons are said to have the right to make free and responsible choices whether or not to marry and to plan a family, as well as deciding whether or not to have children (IPPF 2008, 20–21). The tenth and final article stresses the right of all persons to have effective, adequate, accessible and appropriate measures to demand that those who are duty-bound to uphold sexual rights in the society are fully accountable. *Accountability* and *redress* are what is required of states and authorities, which are urged to establish mechanisms of accountability to ensure that their obligations related to the guarantee of

sexual rights are fully upheld, as well as taking steps to prevent violations of sexual rights (IPPF 2008, 21).

The conclusion of this part of my article is firstly, that approaching sexuality through a human rights lens represents a view of sexuality as being most important to human life. Secondly, at a deeper level human rights approach is aimed at dominant heterosexual ideologies and heteronormative, hierarchical sex orders. The ethical challenge of bringing in the human rights perspective is to connect the sexually weak and powerless with the empowering potential of human rights and thus make it possible for them to break out of the vicious cycles of oppression. Therefore, the human rights discourse can be said to be used as a moral instrument to inspire different agents to entitlements, responsibility and accountability instead of discrimination and inequality on the basis of sexuality. I now move on to the second part of my article, discussing Gayle Rubin's radical theory of sex.

Feminism is not the theory of sexuality

In a pioneering article entitled 'Thinking Sex' from 1984, Gayle Rubin critically considers the current relationship between feminism and sexuality. In her view, sexuality is a nexus of the relationship between genders: '[M]uch of the oppression of women is born by, mediated through, and constituted within, sexuality' (Rubin 1984, 300–301). Making a distinction between two tensions of feminist thought on the subject – a sex liberation tradition and a more conservative sex tradition – she critiques the second movement, pointing out how their discourse recreates a conservative sexual morality. Her main point, however, is not to take side in this conflict, but to challenge the assumption that feminism is or should be the privileged site of a theory of sexuality. Feminism, she writes, 'is the theory of gender oppression. To automatically assume that this makes it the theory of sexual oppression is to fail to distinguish between gender, on the one hand, and erotic desire, on the other' (Rubin 1984, 307).

With this view, Rubin radically changes her previous understanding of sexuality, and instead defends a clear, analytical distinction between gender and sexuality rather than their unification.⁸ The English word 'sex' has two very different meanings, she clarifies: 'It can both mean gender and gender identity as in the *female sex* or the *male sex*, while also referring to sexual activity, lust, intercourse, and arousal, as in *to have sex*' (Rubin 1984, 307). Conflicting with her earlier ideas (1975), she understands sexuality as concerned with 'the sensations of the body, the quality of pleasure and

8. Rubin's theory on the distinction between sex and gender in the 1975 article "The Traffic in Women," is well known to most feminists. The influence of the new scholarship on sex, especially Michel Foucault and Jeffrey Week's theories, is without doubt the most significant factor in this context.

the nature of impressions'. She does not deny that the development of the Western sexual system affects gender, but maintains that even though they are related 'they are not the same thing, and they form the basis of two distinct arenas of social practice' (Rubin 1984, 307).

Rubin's analytical distinction between gender and sexuality from 1984 has not got much support in feminist theories in general. However, such support can be found in the writing of the late feminist theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid.⁹ Like Rubin, Althaus-Reid makes a clear, analytical distinction between gender and sexuality, criticizing feminist liberation theology for its heterosexual foundations. Similar to Rubin, she develops a vision of the sexual value system of Western Christian culture, taking a strong moral stand for the victims of that same system. I now turn to Marcella Althaus-Reid's indecent theology.

Indecent theology for the poor and queer

Feminist Liberation theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid was born in Argentina but later became a professor of contextual theology at New College, at the University of Edinburgh.¹⁰ The main purpose of her 'indecent' theology at the beginning of the 21st century was to dismantle the embedded heterosexual ideology of Christian theology. Sexuality and poverty are two main issues of her writing but according to her, both have been great taboos in theological discourse to the present day. Two of her analytical concepts, the *poor* and the *queer*, may help to illustrate her standpoint. The term *poor* she uses in a broad Liberation theological sense, meaning a site of marginalisation which deals with more than economic circumstances. The term *queer*, on the other hand, she defines as a 'site of struggle where people's oppressed sexualities have become a locus for the struggle for justice in their communities' (Althaus-Reid 2003, 114; 2004, 63).

Justice for the poor and the sexually oppressed is her ethical aim, and the groups of poor and oppressed that she is mainly thinking of are sex workers and those who transgress conventional gender and sexual binaries, like transsexuals and intersex people (Althaus-Reid 2004, 4). Building on Judith Butler's influential theory (*Gender Trouble* 1990), Althaus-Reid challenges the notion that heterosexuality is a given, a natural sexuality, while e.g. homosexuality, lesbianism and bisexualities are deviant sexualities. Instead she acknowledges the wide continuum of chromosomal and morphological variation that exists between the poles of 'male' and 'female', as the examples of transsexuals and intersex people exemplify. Just like Gayle Rubin many

9. Althaus-Reid refers several times to Rubin's works in *Indecent Theology. Theological perversions in sex, gender and politics* from 2000, so it seems clear that she knows her writings well.

10. Althaus-Reid was born in 1952 and died in 2009.

years before (Rubin 1984), Althaus-Reid thus challenges sexual essentialist assumptions by leaning on social constructivist theories arguing that sexuality, in a similar way to gender, is constituted in society and history (Althaus-Reid 2004, 61-64). Referring to Rubin's pattern of a sexual social pyramid, to which I will turn in my next section, Althaus-Reid talks about how the lives and events of people can only become sexual stories if people have a voice and can be heard. 'At the top of Rubin's pyramid', she writes, 'we can hear sexual stories told loudly and clearly, but somehow at the bottom the stories are shouted' (2000, 136).⁴⁹ The sexual stories of the indecent people may have been heard by Christian theology but, according to her, most certainly ignored. However, she points out, there are some contradictions which Rubin does not pay attention to: 'The ability of a story to be heard or not seems to depend not only on its position in the pyramid but also on the type of story. For instance, stories of incest and child abuse are more likely to be heard if they come from the bottom of the pyramid than from the top (Althaus-Reid 2000, 136).

Indecent theology then, is a process that will never be finished. In Althaus-Reid's view, it works like a coming-out process and consists of being suspicious of traditions of heterosexual presuppositions. 'Indecenting' involves bringing back sense of reality to an unjust heterosexist Christian theology which has ignored the stories and experiences of the queer and the poor. 'Indecenting' also means a process of moving away from a theological sexual ideology – which Althaus-Reid also terms 'sexual divinized orthodoxy' which has de-sexualised God, Jesus and Virgin Mary – towards a theology which knows a queer God, cross-dressing Jesus and Virgin Mary as the drag queen. God, Jesus and Virgin Mary should not be made a resource of heterosexual authority, Althaus-Reid claims. Instead Christian theology should reflect on issues of human rights for the sexually marginalised people, the poor and the queer (Althaus-Reid 2000, 63-87; 2004, 99). Now I will return to Gayle Rubin, focusing on some central parts of her radical theory of sex, including her pattern of a sexual social pyramid that Althaus-Reid referred to.

A radical theory of sex

The aim of Rubin's radical theory of sex is to 'identify, describe, explain, and denounce erotic injustice and sexual oppression' (1984, 275). Rubin identifies five 'ideological formations' that all have a strong grip on Western sexual thought. These ideological constructions are 'sex negativity, the fallacy of misplaced scale, the hierarchical valuation of sex acts, the domino theory of sexual peril, and the lack of a concept of benign sexual variation' (Rubin 1984, 278). Out of these five, it is the first and foremost the third

construction I want to concentrate on. But as all five are intrinsically linked I will give a short account of them all.

With the first construction, sex negativity, Rubin proclaims that Western culture treats sex with suspicion, viewing it as a 'dangerous, destructive and negative force'. Historically, Christian religion has had strong influence on culture, preaching the sinfulness of sex, an idea that rests on the belief that the genitalia are an inherently inferior part of the body. To embrace such ideas, Rubin states, is however unnecessary nowadays as such notions have acquired a life of their own and do not need religion in order to persist. The result of such a suspicious cultural view of sex, she continues, is the need to link sex to something else and thus make it more acceptable. The three most acceptable excuses for sex in Western culture are marriage, reproduction and love. No comparable excuses exist in our culture for other types of pleasures, such as the 'enjoyment of food, fiction or astronomy' (Rubin 1984, 278).

The 'fallacy of misplaced scale', as Rubin labels the second construction of the Western ideological formations, is a consequence of sex negativity. Sexual acts are burdened with an excess of significance. Everything that concerns sex becomes an extraordinary case in the Western culture. Rubin argues that this can be seen in the Western sex laws, deriving from biblical pronouncements with their extremely severe punishments, where for example single acts of consensual anal penetrations have been deemed as reason enough for execution (Rubin 1984, 279). According to her, this can also be seen in contemporary medical and psychiatric literature and praxis.

The third Western ideological construction, the hierarchical valuation of sex acts, has, as I already mentioned, direct connections to the topic of this article: sexual diversity and sexual rights. The sexual hierarchy in modern Western societies is described by Rubin (1984, 279) as a pyramid:

Marital, reproductive heterosexuals are alone at the top of the erotic pyramid. Clamoring below are unmarried monogamous heterosexuals in couples, followed by most other heterosexuals. Solitary sex floats ambiguously. The powerful 19th century stigma on masturbation lingers in less potent, modified forms, such as the idea that masturbation is an inferior substitute for partnered encounters. Stable, long-term lesbian and gay male couples are verging on respectability, but bar dykes and promiscuous gay men are hovering just above the groups at the very bottom of the pyramid. The most despised sexual castes currently include transsexuals, transvestites, fetishists, sadomasochists, sex workers such as prostitutes and porn models, and the lowliest of all, those whose eroticism transgresses generational boundaries.

In the quotation above, Rubin describes how differently sexual behaviour is judged by our culture. Those who sit high up in the hierarchy are rewarded with ‘mental health, respectability, legality, social and physical mobility, institutional support, and material benefits’. Those, however, whose sexual behaviour falls lower on the scale, are conversely perceived as mentally ill, disgraceful and criminal. This view results in social and physical restricted mobility, loss of institutional support and economic sanctions. The strength of this stigma, Rubin continues, is rooted in Western religious traditions with their historical focus on sin. More recently, however, the control over sexuality is rather sustained by scientific fields like medicine and psychiatry, but also popular culture, whose mental, emotional and popular categories are no less powerful than the religious. Rubin states that the traditional religious condemnations of whoring, sodomy and adultery, have, however, been replaced by the moral hierarchy of sexual activities in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) by the American Psychiatric Association (APA).

Popular culture is also permeated with ideas that erotic variety is dangerous, unhealthy and immoral. According to Rubin (1984, 280), our culture contains a ‘noxious stew made up of ideas of sexual sin, concepts of psychological inferiority, anti-communism, mob hysteria, accusations of witchcraft, and xenophobia. The mass media nourish these attitudes with relentless propaganda’. All these hierarchies of sexual value, Rubin argues, function in a similar way to ideological systems of racism, ethnocentrism and religious chauvinism. Their aim is, according to her, to justify the well-being of the sexually privileged and the danger of the ‘sexual rabble’.

Rubin’s point here, that the hierarchical Western sexual value system is analogous to racism and sexism, is similar to Jung’s and Smith’s definition of heterosexism, which they argue is a ‘reasoned system of prejudice’ (Jung and Smith 1993, 13). According to them, heterosexism is a pattern of discrimination that pervades most dimensions of Western cultural life. At the heart of this system of prejudice lies *heterocentrism*, which leads to the conviction that heterosexuality is the normative form of human sexuality. Heterocentrism, they argue, ‘is the measure by which all other sexual orientations are judged. All sexual authority, value, and power are centred in heterosexuality’ (Jung and Smith 1993, 14).

With two illustrations, Rubin clarifies two similar, however different, aspects of the sexual value system by talking about the ‘charmed circle’ and the ‘struggle over where to draw the line’. Both diagrams highlight moral evaluations of sex and how such evaluations are connected to certain cultural categories and classifications of people. In the cultural ‘sexual value system’ discourse, the binary concepts of good–bad, normal–abnormal, and

natural–unnatural, all come into display. The charmed circle, depicted in the first illustration, has an inner and an outer circle. The inner circle consists of the good, normal and natural sexuality, and here we find heterosexual, marital, monogamous, reproductive and non-commercial sex, that is, the coupled, relational sex that occurs at home and within the same generation. Any sexuality which violates these rules is considered bad, abnormal and unnatural. The bad sex may be:

Homosexual, unmarried, promiscuous, non-creative or commercial. It may cross generational lines, and may take place in ‘public’ or at least in the baths. It may involve the use of pornography, fetish objects, sex toys, or unusual roles. (Rubin 1984, 280–281)

The second one of Rubin’s illustrations depicts another aspect of the sexual hierarchy: ‘the need to draw and maintain an imaginary line between good and bad sex’. According to Rubin, most discourses on sex define a very small portion of human sexual capacity as ‘sanctifiable, safe, healthy, mature, legal, or politically correct’. The ‘line’ differentiates these from all other erotic behaviours, which are assumed to be the work of the devil, dangerous, psychopathological, infantile or politically wrong. Endless arguments are then conducted over ‘where to draw the line’ and to decide what other activities, if any, may be acceptable enough to cross over into tolerability (Rubin 1984, 282).

The fourth ideological construction, the domino theory of sexual peril, is according to Rubin implicit in all sexual models already mentioned, displaying the constant suspicion and threat that sex causes in Western culture. Most systems of sexual judgments, Rubin maintains, attempt to regulate on which side of the line a particular act falls. On the good side, only heterosexual encounters can be found, most certainly. That does not mean that heterosexual sexuality is always beautiful, free, healing or romantic. On the contrary, it may often be morally complex but as long as heterosexual acts do not disturb other rules, heterosexuality is taken to show the full variety of human experience. All sex acts on the bad side of the line are, in contrast, considered totally disgusting and without emotional gradation. Rubin’s (1984, 282–283) conclusion is thus that the ‘further from the line a sex act is, the more it is depicted as a uniformly bad experience.’

On the last ideological construction, the lack of a concept of benign sexual variation, Rubin writes that variation is a fundamental property of all life, ‘from the simplest biological organisms to the most complex human social formations’. Most people, she argues, have learned to value different cultures as unique expressions of human resourcefulness, rather than as the

inferior or disgusting habits of barbarians. However, this insight is lacking completely in the field of sexuality. Progressive people who would be embarrassed to exhibit cultural prejudice in other areas, normally reveal it towards sexual differences. Highlighting the empirical sex research of Alfred Kinsey and his followers, Rubin maintains that the sexological field provides better empirical ground for a radical theory of sexuality, compared with most theories of her time, including feminist theories. Sexuality according to most systems of thought, she writes, is supposed to follow a single standard. The content of the standard may, however, differ. For religion the ideal standard is procreative marriage, for psychology mature heterosexuality, and for some influential feminist theories all women should turn into lesbians. This kind of sexual morality, Rubin holds, has more in common with ideologies of racism than with true ethics. Rubin's (1984, 283) conclusion is the following:

It grants virtue to the dominant groups, and relegates vice to the underprivileged. A democratic morality should judge sexual acts by the way partners treat one another, the level of mutual consideration, the presence or absence of coercion, and the quantity and quality of the pleasure they provide. Whether sex acts are gay or straight, coupled or in groups, naked or in underwear, commercial or free, with or without video, should not be an ethical concern.

Conclusion

In my article, I have highlighted the fact that around the world, sexual rights struggles are evolving on the basis of human rights claims, with the aim to eliminate discrimination, stigma and state-sanctioned violence towards those groups that are assumed to be sexually diverse. The core message of these struggles, it seems to me, is that sexuality matters for democratic citizenship, meaning that the inclusion and non-discrimination of the sexually marginalised, like LGBTI persons, must be promoted in a much stronger way. This message, I believe, has great relevance to feminist Christian sexual ethics. Another critical point in this message, as I understand it, is that identities should not necessarily be seen as a basis for rights. Rather, rights for people must be sought on the basis of their cultural and sexual diversity.

Further, I find Rubin and Althaus-Reid's contributions on the subject of sexual diversity and their following critique of Western sexual value system, most valuable for the field of feminist Christian sexual ethics. I find their view that feminist theory should make a clear analytical distinction between gender and sexuality, both challenging and constructive. I think they are right in arguing that feminist theology and ethics should reconsider sexuality. Feminist theory, as Rubin pointed out, is not automatically a theory of

sexuality and many feminist views, e.g. concerning sex work, demonstrate essentialised ideas of women as always being innocent and unwilling victims. The ethical question feminists should ask concerning sex work is not only 'Did sex workers choose this work and on what basis was that choice made?' but rather 'What do they want know and how can they be supported?' (Cornwall, Corrêa and Jolly 2008, 36). Lastly, I hold that feminist Christian sexual ethics can learn a great deal from the field of sexology. Sexology is, most definitely, an extensive field. One significant contribution of sexology towards sexual ethics, is of course the acknowledgment of great differences in sexualities across cultures, moving beyond the assumption that the same fixed set of sexual identities are reproduced in every context (Samelius and Wågberg 2005). This understanding challenges the Western hierarchy of good and bad sex, instead of just shifting the place of certain sexualities within that hierarchy. Most notably, this view generates a solid basis for sexual pluralism as a democratic value as well as for the development of sexual rights (Cornwall, Corrêa and Jolly 2008, 23). My concluding words are that not only must Christian and feminist sexual ethics rethink the understanding of binary categories and classifications that are still taken for granted in most of its discourse, such as woman–man; male–female; heterosexual–homosexual; normal–abnormal, but it must also transform its basic view on sexuality and as a result of that, its perception of sexual diversity.

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Conceptual Dilemmas, Political Actions, Feminist Questions

Mia Liinason

How can we understand the role of feminism in the current production of the political, social and cultural climate, where structures of inequality and forms of discrimination are persisting, if not increasing? As of today, several feminist scholarly studies call attention to the precarious situation in which a political discourse on gender and gender equality becomes constructed as a universal marker of Western modernity, related to notions of democracy, liberalism and capitalism (Tuori 2004; Scott 2007; Carbin 2010) and feminist scholars emphasise the urgent need to challenge the meanings that occur within the stabilisation or institutionalisation of this gender discourse (Hemmings 2011).

The relationship between notions such as gender and gender equality¹ is complex, characterised as it is by knowledge exchange but also by tensions, contradictions and disagreements. Yet, interactions between feminist knowledge production and a regulative political discourse on gender equality are often renounced by feminists, who point to a state co-optation and a de-radicalisation of a feminist agenda (Liinason 2011). However, such polarised understandings of the relationship between feminist knowledge production and political discourses might function to obstruct critical analyses of the relationship between feminist knowledge production and the political, historical and cultural context. Therefore, such a critical analysis is what I would like to do in this chapter, and more concretely, to study how discursive understandings of the key concepts (women's, sex, gender) take shape in academic feminism and in the production of political discourses around gender in Sweden.

1. I differ between the notions 'gender' and 'gender equality', but, as will be discussed in the course of this article, I also understand them as linked through their common base in the understanding of the 'gender system', which was introduced in Sweden in KvT 1988 (Hirdman 1988). Here, gender takes shape through an understanding of sex as a more foundational social division than e.g. sexuality and ethnicity, and the gender system (Hirdman 1988) is based on a division between the biological sex (*kön*) and the social sex (*genus*). The gender system is described on the basis of two so-called logics: the primacy of the male norm (hierarchy) and the separation between the male and female spheres. Based in this understanding, gender equality is a political tool to change the implications of this situation (but not necessarily to critically study/challenge the gender system), by arguing for the importance of giving women the same rights as men. In this gender equality discourse, women, as well as men, are often treated as universal and binary (separated) categories, and the struggle for equal rights is based on the male norm (women aim at gaining equal rights with men). However, feminist scholars often critically engage and/or disagree with this production of the gender equality discourse (see e.g. Eduards 2002).

Feminism is not a unified movement, and it is possible to mark out different feminist discourses in Sweden as well. Some of these feminist discourses have taken a more powerful position in the public debate and in the institutionalisation of feminist ideas, whereas others have been silenced or pushed to the margins of the field (Liinason 2011). This also means that it is impossible to provide a reflection on the debates in the field that does not also (at least partly) reconstruct these power asymmetries within feminism in Sweden. In this chapter, however, I do not aim to solve that dilemma, or, as brilliantly worded by Clare Hemmings, to ‘put the story straight’ (2005, 119). Even though such a reading would give an important visibility to many excluded or marginalised voices, I believe that the problem with power asymmetries between different feminist agendas, theoretical perspectives, and methodological tools, would still exist. Instead, the following analysis of the relationships between sex, sexuality, ethnicity and gender in the key concepts, is made in the ambition to critically engage with the dominant discourses in the field.

A concept is a tightly packed container of (contested) understandings of the world, based on ideas of particular social relations reproduced through the use of the concept. In this way, the boundaries drawn within and between different concepts can be understood as representing and creating cognitive and social boundaries: which concepts we use and how we treat them have a strong and direct social and political impact. However, conceptual debates are often contradictory. During the work with this analysis it was for instance interesting to note, that the main arguments put forward in the debates were not always reflected in the notion that was later stabilised as official, or dominant.² Here, the debates around the concept ‘gender’ is a good example, where – as I discuss further ahead – a range of sceptical or critical arguments were raised by feminists against the introduction of such a notion in the Swedish context, but that gender, still, reached official and dominant status in the field. How could the notion reach this status, despite the wide criticism? What was the content of the concept gender, as it was introduced in the Swedish context? How was this understanding related to sex and sexuality, and to the understanding of these notions in an Anglophone context? And what are the implications of this, for feminist knowledge production?

From this outset, I will explore the debates around the terminology in the field of women’s, gender and feminist studies from the 1970s until

2. I distinguish between official and dominant status, where official status refers to governmental policies, and dominant refers to the status of the term in the feminist community. These have not always overlapped (which is the case with gender). During the 1970s and 1980s, for example, equal opportunities research (*jämställdhetsforskning*) was the official notion, while feminists preferred to use women’s studies (*kvinnovetenskap*).

the 1990s, focusing on the concepts that have been positioned in the very core of the subject area: women's (kvinno-), sex (kön), gender (genus). The material I use is collected from different textual sources where this issue has been debated, ranging over articles produced within the field of gender research; articles from *bang*, *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift* (Journal of Women's Studies), conference proceedings, scholarly books, state official investigations and government bills. I begin with discussing the relationship between feminist knowledge production and the production of political discourses around gender equality in Sweden and continue with mapping the different understandings of the concepts. In the analysis, I point out continuities and changes between different concepts, I highlight overlaps and differences between scholarly and governmental understandings of the key concepts, and display some paradoxes for feminism as a project devoted to social change.

Feminist knowledge production and political discourses

There is a widespread description of Sweden³ as unique because of its successful institutionalisation of gender equality, which has led to a presence of gender awareness in a wide variety of societal arenas, ranging from NGOs and educational institutions, to state official sectors (Flink and Lundkvist 2010; Hemmings 2006). The strong political discourse around gender equality has led to indications of Sweden as a 'women-friendly' country (Hernes 1987). However, the articulations of women's equal rights have also met critique for an ignorance and exclusion of differences and inequalities between women, and the relationship between gender equality and cultural diversity take shape through multi-levelled and complex articulations of women's equal rights.

The earlier ambitions of feminism to focus on unity in the feminist movement have recently been questioned by feminist scholars, who argue for the importance of acknowledging tensions, contradictions and conflicts between feminist groups, in an understanding of feminism as a heterogeneous field of research and practice, visualising differences in women's lives and experiences (Liinason 2011; Carbin 2010). The relationship between feminism and gender equality is described as problematic by feminists who want to distance themselves from heterosexist, ethnocentric and capitalist models. I locate this analysis in such a tradition of scholarship, where the multi-faceted relationship between the creation of the so-called women-friendly society and the exclusionary practices in the Swedish society is

3. This is also applicable to Denmark and Norway, as – among others – Flink and Lundkvist (2010), and Halsaa, Predelli and Thun (2008), call attention to. Further, Finland has similar patterns in their political discourse, as shown by Tuori (2004).

critically investigated, and I agree with postcolonial feminist and critical feminist scholars who find it necessary to intervene in the production of a story of feminist success in Sweden (e.g. Eduards 2007; Siim and Skjeie 2008; Hellgren and Hobson 2008; Borchost and Siim 2008; Carbin 2010; Yang 2010).

Among feminists, both within and outside of Sweden, references to the successful institutionalisation of feminist ideas in Sweden occur frequently, and notions of Sweden as a feminist utopia are distributed. This is a narrative where gender scholarship is presented as occupied with investigating the possibilities for equal rights between the sexes, and it is composed by references to the scholars' and the state's combined efforts to develop a society where women and men are on equal footing (see e.g. Qvist 1978; Hernes 1987; Florin 2006). This research has developed successfully ever since the study of sex roles and social structure in the 1930s (Rosenbeck 1998; Bondestam 2003; Holter 1980), with a culmination towards the end of the 20th century, when Carl Tham, the educational minister at the time, created a system for affirmative action in order to increase the number of female professors in the academy, when the Swedish minister for gender equality called Sweden 'a champion of gender equality', and when the Prime Minister called himself 'a feminist' (Carbin 2008, 26; Eduards 2007). To a large extent, this story is often parallelised with notions of the 'Swedish model', that is, the efforts to develop the welfare state through the development of the Swedish Folkhem, a process that was initiated in 1928 (Yang 2010, 56). The development of the Folkhem, was connected to the ambition to 'make Sweden Swedish', as ethnologists Billy Ehn, Jonas Frykman and Orvar Löfgren emphasise: 'The Folkhem was based on an apprehension of collective progress: a unified nation that resolutely marched into a common future' (1993, 54). In effect – and as explored by the political scientist Maud Eduards, among others, in her analysis of the connections between discursive and material (female) bodies and the production of the nation in Sweden – the working model for Swedish feminists since the end of the 19th century was accomplished through an articulation of a complementarity between the sexes (Eduards 2007, 13-31, 243-294, Hellgren and Hobson 2008)⁴.

4. Notably, the idea of complementarity between the sexes is founded upon an assumption of compulsory heterosexuality – an assumption with problematic implications not only for non-heterosexual practises, but also for locations at the very outside of those kinship structures, which becomes evident in the following comment by Haraway on Rubin's sex/gender system: 'Rubin's 1975 theory of the sex/gender system explained the complementarity of the sexes (obligatory heterosexuality) and the oppression of women by men through the central premise of the exchange of women in the founding of culture through kinship [...] But what happens to this approach when women are not positioned in similar ways in the institution of kinship?' (Haraway 1991:144). Haraway aims at a discussion about the connections between gender and race, by scrutinising the position of the slave woman in the kinship system.

And indeed, harmony between the sexes is still expressed as a core value in the Swedish context – visualised not least by the strong emphasis on the relationship between the sexes seen in terms like ‘sex role’, ‘equal opportunities’, ‘sex system’, and ‘gender’, as I will show further ahead in this chapter. Eduards write ‘[t]here is a strong and continuously vivid belief in the value of a natural body order, which is built upon a heterosexual and harmonizing logic, with the family in the centre. A proper woman is co-operative, both in the home and in politics’ (2007, 278).

Against this background, however, it is also possible to understand the great influence that the notion ‘gender’ (‘genus’) reached in Sweden during the 1990s. Perfectly combining the purposes of both the state (to develop policies based on a heterosexual and harmonising logic) and feminism (receiving interest in and support for research on the relationship between the sexes), the introduction of gender as the dominant and official notion in Sweden resulted in a perpetuation of the national project based on ideas of complementarity between the sexes. There was, though, and still is, no unity among feminists around the usefulness of the concept, nor of its interpretation. Yet, dominant patterns take shape in the discussions around the key concepts in this field of study. How are the relationship between women and men, between sex and sexuality, and between sex, gender, ethnicity and class, articulated in these debates? How do particular concepts solidify these relationships, and what does this mean for feminist knowledge production, understood as a transformative project aiming at visualising and destabilising power relations, exclusionary logics and hegemonic practices?

Mapping the key terms

The subject field in Sweden today most commonly referred to as ‘gender studies’, has a number of different designations in the academy around the world: women’s studies, feminist studies, gender studies, sexuality studies etc. Furthermore, the terminology often varies within national contexts and has also frequently shifted over the years. In Sweden, gender studies has had several different and at times overlapping names: sex roles research, equal opportunities research, women’s studies, gender studies. When the subject field that today is called gender studies started to get established within the academy, this was made in an explicit ambition to radically transform and change research, through what was called a ‘corrective’ approach (Davies, Göransson and Lindberg 1980; Aniansson et al 1983, 8; Göransson 1989). It was, consequently, not a question of adding women to conventional research. As the editors of the first issue of *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift* write: ‘Women’s studies is not a complement, it is a corrective approach that aims to correct already existing results and theories. It has to be a part of every research area

– for the sake of research’ (Davies, Göransson and Lindberg 1980, 5). What in the end of the 1960s was called the ‘Women’s question’ (‘kvinnofrågan’, Dahlström 1968, 29), and towards the end of the 1970s more often was denominated as ‘women’s aspect’ (‘kvinnoaspekt’, Westman Berg 1978, 94), evolved during the early 1980s to ‘research with women’s perspective’ (‘forskning med kvinnoperspektiv’, Rapport från Kvinnouniversitetet 1983, 8). The prefix ‘women’s’ (‘kvinno-’) marked the connection to the women’s movement (Manns 2009, 285) and with these concepts, the scholars argued for the need of a thorough change of the content and form of research. In the introduction to the report from the first conference that was held in the field, in Umeå 1982, research upholding ‘women’s perspective’ was described as: a) subject critical, b) problem oriented and interdisciplinary, and c) more holistic than conventional research because, as it was explained, it embraces all aspects of life (Aniansson et.al. 1983, 8).

From the end of 1972, the different constructions with the prefix ‘women-’, and ‘sex roles’ on a policy and research level were accompanied by the notion ‘jämsällldhet’, meaning equal opportunities between the sexes. The official English translation of ‘jämsällldhet’ today is ‘gender equality’. At that point of time, there was no distinction between the notions when translated from Swedish to English. ‘Equal opportunities’ was thus the official translation of both ‘jämsällldhet’ (‘gender equality’) and ‘jämlighet’ (‘equal opportunities’). ‘Jämlighet’ (‘equal opportunities’) refers to the equal rights of all, irrespective of ethnicity, religion, sexuality, sex, age, ability etc. and is thus a wider concept than ‘jämsällldhet’ (‘gender equality’), which specifically refers to equal opportunities between women and men (Holm 2001,1, 179). When equal opportunities research became the official notion of the field, it was used in the same meaning as gender equality is used today. The official status of the notion also meant that it became the name of the positions that were initiated – even though most of the scholars themselves did not use that notion (SOU 1983:4, 11; Holm 2001).

The notion ‘feministisk forskning’ (‘feminist research’) emerged during the 1970s. ‘Feminism’ was, however, negatively marked by Marxism as an ‘unhistorical, bourgeois and ugly word belonging to the ideological superstructure and nothing for history-materialist science’ (Holm 1993; Göransson 1983, 26). This resulted in a general dissociation from the notion. Yet, later on, more and more Swedish women’s studies scholars began to identify themselves as feminist scholars (Holm 1993, 33). Feminist research was given explicit normative aims, where a political commitment was understood as constituting the base for the liberation of women from various kinds of oppression or discrimination. Feminist research was emancipatory and feminist scholars had a high ideological and theoretical awareness (Holm

1993, 34). Nonetheless, one of the critical points that were raised against equal opportunities research was also raised against feminist research: that it was too political. In addition, it was also criticised for being too idealist. However, the theoretical reflection, as Eduards explains, was based on the political commitment, and the theorisation was perceived as a necessary link in the work for liberation, but, she emphasises, theory should not be theory for its own sake (1995, 62). The goal for feminists, Eduards continues, was that theory and political practice should be in constant collaboration and that 'feminist theory' should not be understood as a united theory, but as connected through common central concepts like women's oppression, power, patriarchy, emancipation (1995, 62).

Towards the mid-1980s, the Marxist terminology which had been popular among some groups of women's studies scholars was abandoned, due to criticism of universalism in Marxism, along with other reasons. With that, the earlier strong focus on class issues (see e.g. Davies, Göransson and Lindberg 1980) disappeared from the agenda, and was abandoned until it resurfaced in the late 1990s, when it was reactivated together with the emphasis on the entwinement of different social structures and social orders, such as sexuality, ethnicity – and class.

However, in the mid-1980s, scholars started to focus on the relations between women and men, between femininity and masculinity, and between social and biological sex (Åsberg 1998, 30)⁵. This was also one of the reasons why the prefix 'women' was abandoned in preference for notions that focused on sex as a relation, and 'sex system' ('könssystem'), 'social sex system' ('socialt könssystem') or 'sexual power system' ('könsmaktssystem'), were concepts that started to be used by scholars in the field (Göransson 1989, 8). In 1988, the gender system was introduced ('genussystemet', Hirdman 1988), which came to have great impact among both scholars and politicians. This understanding of the gender system was also the basis for the concept 'gender' ('genus') that came to be an important concept in the field. In Anglo-American feminist theory, gender had already been used for several years when the debate around 'genus' was deployed in Sweden. Ann Oakley's *Sex, Gender and Society* from 1972, is often described as 'a path-breaking text', depicting new areas of interpretation for feminist theory,

5. Some scholars explain this shift as one between modernist and postmodernist approaches (see e.g. Mulinari 2002). With the increased popularity of poststructuralist approaches in the late 1980s, the notion of 'differences' entered feminist scholarship in Sweden more extensively. This meant, that notions of 'differences', as introduced in Sweden, were not informed by ideas of social organisation, but by poststructuralism, where 'differences' were understood as 'multiple and fluid identities', as postcolonial scholar Diana Mulinari writes (2002, 18). Distinguishing between 'differences' as a term which focuses on structural inequalities and 'differences' as a term referring to power relations constituted by linguistic structures, Mulinari calls attention to the large varieties in analyses of power in Marxist and radical feminism on the one hand, and in postmodernist feminism on the other (2002, 18).

and more specifically, explorations of the construction of gender (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004, 56; Oakley 1972). However, the understanding of the gender system when it was introduced in Sweden in the late 1980s, drew on a selection of the writings by J W Scott and Gayle Rubin. In her presentation of the gender system, Yvonne Hirdman wrote that the sex/gender system was based on two logics: the logic of separation, where male and female spheres were kept apart; and the primacy of the male norm, where men were superior to women (Hirdman 1988). Hirdman conceptualised the sex/gender system as a stable system, founded on the idea of hierarchies between men and women⁶. Through her stable dual model, nevertheless, Hirdman also excludes the central characteristics in Rubin's theoretical framework: a) sexuality, b) the creation of categories of people, c) the relationship between the sex/gender system and other systems, and d) the historical contextuality of the sex/gender system that changes within different modes of production. Unlike several successors, Rubin emphasised that the sex/gender system not only denotes how biological sex is social sex or gender, but also how the human sexuality is formed along certain tracks – how heterosexuality is given the status of the institutionalised norm. Rubin refers to the double meaning of 'sex', i.e. both as sex and sexuality. To her, gender was a product of the social relations of sexuality and reproduction, supplemented by the idea that the sexual division of labour creates male and female heterosexuals (Rubin 1975). Lacking these dimensions, Hirdman's model ignored the complex dimensions which the attention to the interrelatedness between different social systems and different modes of production in Rubin's sex/gender system takes into account. Hirdman's model also excluded the relationship between sexuality, sex and gender, in a conceptualisation of the 'gender system' ('genussystemet') that resulted in a reification of the hierarchies between men and women, as well as a reification of gender differences and compulsory heterosexuality.

6. Hirdman's conceptualisation of the sex/gender system had many similarities with the definition of gender that had been introduced by Joan Wallace Scott a few years earlier. Scott's definition of gender was constituted by two interconnected parts that should be kept analytically apart. As a constitutive element in social relations, Scott argued, gender is based on perceived differences between the sexes. In addition, she meant that gender and power mutually constitute each other (cf. Scott 1986). Hirdman also shared similarities with some ideas in Gayle Rubin's influential essay from 1975. There are, however, large discrepancies between Hirdman and Rubin. One thing is the lack of attentiveness to different social systems in Hirdman's model. Another is the conceptualisation of hierarchies. Rubin wanted to exchange the concept 'patriarchy' with the 'sex/gender system' (cf. Rubin 1975). For Rubin, patriarchy was a male dominated form of sex system and thus hierarchical per definition. She wanted to give room for the possibility of egalitarian sex/gender systems, and reserved patriarchy for a particular form of male dominance, described as older men's power over younger men, women and children (cf. Rubin 1975) whereas (male) primacy, as it was introduced by Hirdman, came to be tied to her idea of the gender system, interpreted as a stable hierarchy between the sexes.

Debates

During the mid 1990s, 'equal opportunities' evolved into 'gender' as the official notion within the subject field, and also in national policies in Sweden – but this terminological change did not happen without debate among the scholars. The debate started before the notion gender was introduced for a wider group of researchers (in KvT 1988:3), and those who were sceptical towards the concept of gender expressed worries that it could result in a separation between 'natural' sex and socially constructed gender, in which the natural could be seen as more primary than the socially constructed. Keeping in mind that the Swedish word for sex involves an understanding of sex as both socially and biologically constructed, these were highly relevant questions. That the double meaning of 'sex' in the English language ('sex'/'kön', and 'sexuality'/'sexualitet') disappeared with the translation into the Swedish 'sex' ('kön') was, however, not discussed to any greater extent, nor was the fact that the reflection around compulsory heterosexuality from Gayle Rubin's sex/gender system had been left out in Hirdman's version.

In this debate, Karin Widerberg (1992, 28) among others, cautioned that a division between sex and gender could make the social construction of (biological) sex invisible. Furthermore, Maud Eduards and Ulla Manns (1987, 63) showed that the understanding which was presented in the gender system developed by Hirdman, was based upon a presumed connection between a biological and social sex. Many also meant that a concept like gender was unnecessary in Swedish, which is a language where concepts like 'social sex' and 'sex perspective' had been used, that is to say, notions that did not make any difference between biological, social, cultural or symbolical orders. 'Social sex', these critics argued, could embrace different social relations/orders, like sex, class and ethnicity (Åsberg 1998, 31). Those who argued for gender, on the other hand, found that the advantages with the concept was its (sex) neutrality, the emphasis on the relationship between women and men, and its international usability (Åsberg 1998, 34).

During the 1990s, the term gender came to dominate the field as a whole. In one of the chapters to the State Official Investigation (SOU 1990:44) on power and democracy in Sweden, Hirdman presented her theory on the gender system that she had introduced in *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift* two years earlier (SOU 1990:44). In the State Official Investigation, she reached a different audience – among them members of the parliament – from the one encountered in *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift*. Her introduction of the gender system and the gender concept in particular, gave a certain impact on political policies around gender, in the academy and the public debate. In the political discourse, earlier terms like 'oppression of women', 'male norm' and 'male supremacy' were exchanged for the, as it was stated, more neutral

terminology – the ‘gender system’. This placed focus on gendered power as a system, and gave specific attention to the interplay between men and women in this system, which was one of the basic ideas in Hirdman’s gender system. This, in turn, led to gender mainstreaming in policy decisions (SOU 1995:110; Prop. 1990/91:113; Prop. 1993/94:147). It led to changes also in the academy. During the mid-1990s, the greater part of the departments changed their names from constructions with ‘women’s studies’ to ‘gender studies’. At the turn of the century, there existed 16 gender studies units in Sweden, eleven of which used the term ‘gender’, five used ‘women’s studies’ and one made use of the term ‘equal opportunities’ (Rönblom 2003, 33). As of today (2011), 22 of 23 listed units at the Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research use combinations with ‘gender’, only one uses the denomination ‘feminist research’ (Örebro university). The official scholarly journal in the field, *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift*, changed its name to *Tidskrift för genusvetenskap*, (Journal for Gender Studies) in the autumn of 2006.

However, when the government implemented gender as the official notion in policy documents and reports, they emphasised the differences between women and men, aiming to increase quality and democracy (Prop. 1994/95:164, 7). In the mid-1990s, the government wrote a bill which focused on gender equality within the area of higher education. Here, they take their point of departure in the assumption that women pose other questions, focus on other issues and are interested in other areas of work than men. The fact that this issue had been ignored or marginalised in the area of higher education was identified as the problem the government wanted to solve. Together with the idea of a distribution of quotas – both women and men should have the same right to take part in the same areas – this constituted the basic idea of the government’s gender equality policy (Jordansson 1999, 6–7; Prop. 1994/95:164). Gender was thus described in terms of differences between the sexes:

Gender is here interpreted as sex and sex roles, not as biological, but as basic conceptions in culture, society or history. [...] Women can, for instance, take interest in other areas of research, introduce other questions, or take departure from other, perhaps interdisciplinary, methods and perspectives. Through the presence of women in different areas of research, their perspectives and preferences will have a stronger possibility to influence the aims and formation of the work. (Prop. 1994/95:164, 27, my translation)

In the governmental understanding, any deeper and more complex understandings of power relations and power structure are absent. In addition, through its conceptualisation of women and men as universal groups belonging to separated spheres, it refers back to a dual-sex model and links biological sex with social sex, which is a fixation of the conceptual tool that not only de-radicalises the work on gender equality, but also results in confusion between gender research and gender equality, seeing that many gender researchers do not want to reinforce an understanding of women and men as universal categories, but want to critically study relationships between gender and power, and challenge normative categorisations.

Continuities and changes

In spite of the different opinions about the benefits with gender, there were also considerable similarities between the different notions that circulated in the field towards the end of the 1980s and early 1990s. Concepts like 'social sex' and 'gender system' both locate the relations between the sexes in the centre, illustrated by a comparison with concepts like 'women's aspect' and 'women's perspective', where the focus is on a holistic perspective in the analyses of women's material conditions, often with a structural understanding of social organisation (Gornitzka 1978, 26; Brekke and Haukaa 1980, 31; Göransson et al. 1984, 76). Through concepts like 'social sex system' or 'gender system', an emphasis on a perception of power as relational was developed towards the end of the 1980s. Here, it was the relationship between women and men that was the focus (Göransson 1989, 8). In addition, when gender was accepted as the official concept in the field, it also turned out to affect the understanding of 'sex', which subsequently became perceived as more reserved for biological sex than before (Rönblom 2003, 35). And even though 'gender' a few years into the 1990s, gained popularity among the researchers, the scepticism against 'gender' also continued to put its imprint on the discussions. Particularly when 'gender' was presented as a popular political notion, gender studies scholars expressed cautions that gender research could lose its radicalism (Rönblom 2003). Today, the label 'gender studies' can be understood as an illustration of the precarious situation of establishing a radical movement simultaneously taken up by the government and the policy-making bodies (Holm 2001). This is also described as characteristic for the Swedish 'state-friendliness' where social critical tendencies are solved by interferences from the social reformist state (Göransson 1983, 26). Kari Jegerstedt (2000) argues, consequently, that this popularity of gender reflects the prioritisation in academic settings on equal opportunities between the sexes.

Researchers also questioned the idea in the gender system about a universal subordination of women. Gender, as it had been introduced and interpreted in the Swedish context, was developed in an understanding of binary, universal categories. The category 'woman' in the gender system was understood as a universal category, and positioned in opposition to men as an equally universal category. However, with the ambition to take into account the interrelatedness between different power orders, scholars also argued for investigations of how gender and power are embodied through different social orders, such as class, ethnicity, sexuality and geopolitics (Mulinari and Goodman 1999; Brekke and Haukaa 1980).

Reactions and implications

The change from women's studies to gender studies transformed the political dimensions of the name in various and contradictory ways. From an explicit focus on women as the object of study, and with an interest in women's material conditions, experiences and social relations, the emphasis on gender took a distance from women's experiences of structural inequalities, but opened up for the inclusion of various kinds of gender-related practises and phenomena, such as sexuality and masculinity. As an inclusive notion, gender is able to accommodate a wide range of objects. It is tempting, therefore, to interpret the terminological shift from women's studies to gender studies as a reaction to the critique of 'woman' as a universal category⁷. Indeed, this idea, that the participation of new agents (i.e. postcolonial and queer feminists) and a more developed theoretical discussion (i.e. poststructuralism) have caused these terminological changes, is in fact the dominant narrative in writings about the name and the name changes of the subject field in Sweden (www.genus.se; Thurén 2003, 12, 73). Notably, when studying the descriptions of the terminological shifts, the transformations from sex roles research, equal opportunities research and women's studies in the 1960s, -70s and -80s to gender studies in the late 1980s, appear through a narrative which tells a story about a development from 'unity' in the early years, to 'heterogeneity' in the late 1980s – which was also noted by Clare Hemmings in her analysis on feminism's narration of its own history (Hemmings 2005; Mulinari and Sandell 1999). Hemmings shows that this not only fixes 'racial and sexual critique as decade-specific' but is also implicitly progressive through positioning feminist poststructuralists as the first to 'deconstruct woman', despite the fact, she stresses, that 'deconstructive analyses always have been one important feature in feminist theory' (Hemmings 2005, 116).

7. This despite the fact that, as illuminated by this analysis, conceptualisations of women and men as universal categories also were incorporated in the understanding of 'gender', as it was introduced in the Swedish context.

Reading through the texts and debates surrounding the terminological shifts, however, it would be possible to understand the choice of 'gender' as the result of a conjunction between the feminist hopes for an inclusive (i.e. women and men), anti-essentialist concept, and the state political search for an inclusive, pragmatic concept. However, gender, in the Swedish context, not only came to link biological and social sex, it was also based on an understanding of the two sexes/genders as universal, and of women as opposed and subordinated to men. The differences and power asymmetries within the group of women were not addressed in the conceptual framework. The distinction between social/cultural constructions of sex and biological constructions of sex resulted in a confirmation of the border between the social sex, understood as changeable, and the biological sex, understood as static. Under-theorised uses of the term gender might thus risk reinforcing gender differences, developing further ideas of sex (*kön*) as biology, and of biology as stable and prior to social/cultural constructions of sex. The lack of attention to the relationship between sex–sexuality–gender in culture, society and history may, furthermore, reify the heterosexual matrix, when using gender (*genus*) as it was introduced in the Swedish context.

The strong impact from the government on the key concepts and the naming of the field of study, has evoked strong reactions from the scholars in the field, through, among other issues, an explicit rejection of the notion 'equal opportunities research' in the early 1980s and a growing suspicion against the concept 'gender' after the governmental support of the term. This also makes a critical and persistent attitude clear among feminist scholars against a weakening of the transformative potential of gender research. The debate sketched here, traces a range of issues, e.g. arguments pro or against a firm definition of the key concepts, pro or against neutral concepts or more politically laden notions, and I would suggest that the picture drawn up by the debate, on the one hand, urges for efforts to stabilise the concepts, where some contributions to the debate offer normative or descriptive arguments for their case. On the other hand, the multiple responses to these efforts in the debate and the hesitance against a fixation of a proper name can be understood as a transformative practice in itself, keeping up a resistance to a stabilisation of the feminist agenda, which also offers hope for the possibilities of the project of institutionalising gender research as an oppositional forum in the academy.

However, despite the critical debate, this analysis also shows that the concept that today has an official and dominant status, is a concept that not only reifies a dual-sex model and the heterosexual matrix, but also disregards connections between different social relations, modes of production and social structures. The political discourse around gender equality, in return,

further articulates these understandings, through complex and contradictory articulations of equal rights. As earlier explained, Sweden is often referred to as 'women-friendly' (Hernes 1987) but the question of equal rights (for women) in relation to sexuality, ethnicity, and culture is problematic (Bredström 2008; Carbin 2010). Gender equality has become a marker of the Swedish state identity, and the belief that Sweden has gone furthest in achieving gender equality has produced the self-image that Sweden has developed a model for other countries to emulate. Sweden presents itself as a 'just, gender equal and ethnically homogenous country' (Hellgren and Hobson 2007, 13), but Swedishness in terms of gender equality, modernity and welfare is contrasted with past times, or other, and traditional cultures (Arora Jonsson 2009). This political discourse is a discourse where – as has been described by critical inquiries in all Scandinavian countries – clashes between cultures are constructed, and migrant groups are pressured to respect the, as it is presented, fundamental values of democracy and gender equality (Halsaa, Predelli and Thun 2008).

Feminist questions

What does this mean for feminism? At first, the built-in heterosexuality, the dual-sex model, the stable hierarchy between the sexes and the disregard of multiple social relations and structures such as sexuality, ethnicity and class in the concept gender, shape particular dilemmas for a feminism that aims to challenge instead of secure these relationships. In order for the subject field to reach a more solid and professional identity, it is also important in this context to acknowledge that – despite the widespread criticism against the concept gender – critical gender researchers also found benefits with using the notion gender during the late 1980s and the 1990s⁸. Secondly, through its 'successful' incorporation in both state policies and feminist practices, the concept gender also functions as a consolidator of the success story of feminism in Sweden, propelled by its own self-reinforcement and the ideas of the national project of harmony and complementarity between the sexes.

Consequently, it is not because of the risk of a state co-optation and a de-radicalisation of the transformative agenda that I want to suggest that we need to critically engage with the production of this gender discourse in the political climate in Sweden, but because I believe that feminism has a responsibility to take issue with the effects of the knowledge that feminism produces. The transfer of feminist knowledge to the state in Sweden was not the result of a state co-optation, as described earlier (see e.g. Göransson

8. This was, however, also criticised by feminists, both in- and outside of Sweden, who argued that 'the discourse on gender, as part of postmodern feminism has contributed to the depoliticization of the women's movement' (Mies and Bennholt-Thomsen 1999, 196; Norlander 1994).

1989), but one of close interaction and knowledge exchange well fitted to its purpose, a relationship that also was beneficial to gender researchers (Norlander 1997). However, in order to shed light on the centrality of heterosexism and ethnocentrism to the production of this gender discourse, feminism's critical tools are crucial, as underlined by Clare Hemmings (2011, 11). In addition, the importance of a feminist engagement with 'how to navigate the various pitfalls of racism, ethnocentrism, cultural relativism, and plain ignorance that flow from using culture as an explanatory tool' cannot be understated, as anti-racist scholar Vron Ware points out (2006, 532). Against this background, it is also important to position the implications and responsibility of feminist knowledge production in a global context where postcolonial and queer scholars describe the need for criticisms against international women's rights or sexual rights projects understood as more or less imperialist (Grewal and Kaplan 2002).

In closing, I do not want to argue for the abandonment of gender as a concept and for the advantage of other concepts, even though it is probably clear from my analysis that I disagree with the usefulness of gender as it was introduced and used within the Swedish context. In return, I could also suggest that a critical analysis of the understandings and effects of 'queer' and 'intersectionality' in gender scholarship and political discourse in Sweden of today would be very interesting. However, and more important, depending on how we use and understand certain concepts, and depending on the scholarly, historical and political context, we are also able to reach different knowledge around power relations and social structures through critical understandings and careful uses of the same notions. And therefore, instead of advocating the use of one notion before another, I want to suggest that these conceptual dilemmas require responsible action, by which I mean a critical engagement with, and a visualisation of, the theoretical and political tensions that arise through the construction and use of particular concepts in specific contexts, and want to argue for an understanding of the conceptual dilemmas in gender studies in Sweden as power struggles over how feminism responds to the situated complexities in women's lives.

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Part IV. Gender and change

From Research to Gender Politics: On Gender Relations, Identity Politics and Visionary Dialogues

*Maria Jansdotter Samuelsson, Clary Krekula
and Magnus Åberg*

A headline in a Swedish evening paper from 2007 reads: 'Sweden: The Most Gender Equal Country in the World' (Aftonbladet 2007). The World Economic Forum (WEF) had just presented its annual report, the Gender Gap Index, founded on acknowledged statistics which measure differences in men and women's power, possibilities and rights in different countries based on several different variables. For the third time in a row Sweden ranked as number one and the article concludes that: 'Sweden and its Nordic neighbours are the most gender equal countries in the world.' The word 'neighbours' signals that there is a closeness between the Nordic countries, that we have embarked on a joint journey towards gender equality, and that together we have been successful. From an international gender political perspective in particular, our countries are often seen as a homogenous collective, and the 'Scandinavian welfare model' is a concept used as a shining example to other countries (Daly and Rake 2003).

However, even if one remains on a global statistical level it is easy to see that the development is not linear; the future does not steadily improve in terms of increased gender equality. Gender equality cannot be taken for granted, not even in Sweden, which has lost its top position in the WEF's more recent rankings. Perhaps it is especially important, as we do in this book, to problematise gender relations in Nordic countries, seeing that these are sometimes passed as 'leaders' of the development without any further reflection being made. *The question is in what direction the development is heading, or rather, where do we see the tendencies of a positive change today, where is stability being retained and where do gender preserving patterns increase?*

Nothing new under the sun?

The articles of this book provide examples from many different areas of society on how gender relations are shaped, repeated and challenged. Perhaps it would be possible to use these chapters as a starting point to claim that time seems to be standing still. It can be tempting to connect to Yvonne Hirdman's now two-decade-old remark that no crucial changes seem to have taken place within the framework of the gender system during the postwar era

(SOU 1990:44). Several of the results presented in the articles support such an interpretation. One of the more disheartening examples can be found in Hedlin and Åberg's study (chap. 7) which demonstrates that it is still possible within the framework of teacher education to undisputedly present archaic notions of women as more empathetic and soft, while masculinity is connected with physical strength and being 'straight to the point'. Gender researchers have problematised and criticised such descriptions of assumed female and male characteristics for a long time. It is problematic that they still have a foothold, in particular in terms of teachers, who have a strong influence on the values of future generations (cf. Hedlin and Åberg 2011).

In order for children and young people to have equal opportunities, power and security in society, their preschool and school environment has to be characterised by values and attitudes towards gender that encourage and support gender equality. However, good schools are not enough if home and workplace conditions are not also supporting men and women's equal opportunities. Parents have to be in a good position to combine family and working life in order to manage this double load. In relation to this it is interesting to reflect upon the results from Bjørnholt's study (chap. 4) on Norwegian family politics and the study conducted by Holth, Jordansson and Gonäs (chap. 5) which looks at the Swedish labour market. The latter relates closely to Hirdman's analysis that minor changes have taken place in the gender segregated labour market and points to the fact that women still carry the main responsibility for the unpaid work in the home. The authors emphasize the importance of seeing the connection between family and working life, and it is precisely the lack of this connection in Norwegian family politics that Bjørnholt is critical of. Based on her analysis, family politics have in recent years come to consider power relations in the home as an issue concerning the home only, which means that the work towards a more gender equal society is depoliticised and trivialised.

Family politics are central in the 'Scandinavian welfare model', but as pointed out by Bergman and Rantalaiho (2011), there are big differences between family politics in the Nordic countries. To mention one example, both Finland and Norway were way ahead of Sweden in implementing childcare allowance. While the allowance has been widely criticised in Norway after its implementation, the criticism has more or less died down in Finland and here Bergman and Rantalaiho argue that it is relevant to speak of development in terms of *new familism*, a return to the family that is principally led by young women.

The examples that have been put forward above could at first glance be seen as signs of stability in gender relations. This, however, is not equivalent to the idea that 'nothing is happening'. The example of *new familism* is

on the contrary a reaction to ongoing changes in society (Bergman and Rantalaiho 2011). It is within the realm of family politics that many of the successes of gender equality efforts have been found over the past decades, e.g. extended parents' insurance and childcare. However, one cannot rest against these successes; the battle on how family and working life should be ordered persists. With a Foucaultian perspective one could make the claim that power cannot be erased, only changed and shifted (Foucault 2002). This means that positive changes in gender relations can never be taken for granted, but must always be defended.

Therefore, it is also important to question the established notions of the Nordic countries as gender equal (Magnusson, Rönblom and Silius 2008). One such notion holds that mothers and fathers are more equal today than before. In the family sphere, gender equality politics have admittedly contributed to a shift in the notions of the 'good mother'. Jansdotter Samuelsson shows in her study (chap. 2) how the cultural ideals of parenthood that are spread through popular culture both challenge and recreate traditional gender relations. In glossy magazines, feminists' long-lasting cry for women's economic and social independence is being wrapped in a consumerist discourse which transforms freedom into an obligation. One has to be 'free' in the right way, which means that children, mothers and homes should be fitted with the right attributes and be equipped with the 21st century version of independence with all that it entails in terms of designer clothes, child safety equipment, renovated kitchens and bathrooms, and, for the mothers, attractiveness on the heterosexual relationship market.

Thus, feminism and gender equality politics have from a cultural perspective contributed to shifts in gender relations. At the same time it is not a given consequence, as Jansdotter Samuelsson points out, that this will lead to the emancipation of women. Rather, the example of the 'good mother', as presented in popular magazines, demonstrates how stability and dynamics within gender relations can coexist side by side. Instead of formulating questions on change *or* continuity, it is therefore more fruitful to investigate the processes and practices which stabilise or de-stabilise gender relations.

In educational research the concept *travelling discourses* have been used to label how ideas are quickly picked up, packaged and spread on a global scale. As an example, it has been used to describe how the discourse of boys' poor grades have spread to many Western countries, and been added to different national educational discourses (Lahelma, Arnesen and Öhrn 2008). Such rapid, globalised phenomena have made it more and more difficult to speak of 'models' that are shaped with the nation as a foundation. One example of such a phenomenon can be found in Danielsen and Mühleisen's study

(chap. 1) on the national Norwegian parental education. The Norwegian state offers an entire population the same educational concept which is drawn partly from the USA. This illustrates how global flows today can affect a country like Norway – which according to current statistics is ‘the world’s most gender equal country’ (Hausmann, Tyson and Zahidi 2011) – in an area where it can be seen as a role model, namely the family sphere. The title of the educational programme, *Living Well Together (Godt Samliv)*, signals that the care for the child should be founded on the parents’ good sexual and loving relations to one another. This way, what is personal becomes political, linked both to the strive of the nation-state to produce capable and well-functioning citizens, and to global, capitalistic flows in the shape of a product, *Living Well Together*, which has developed in the academic world. Subsequently, an interesting analytical challenge for the future research of gender studies must be to see the complexity in such globalised movements, and not refrain from looking at how emancipated discourses as well, e.g. different feminisms, can be linked to market economical ideologies.

The role of gender research in a complex world

To one-sidedly view gender relations as unchangeable seems problematic against the backdrop of the description above. The concept travelling discourses is a way of analytically capturing how transfers and shifts take place in a globalised world. At the same time as concepts in motion create openings they can also contribute to a stabilisation of previous, and even archaic, scientific understandings. One example of this is the backlog that is created when knowledge from gender research is translated into political concepts and incorporated in political goals, policies, rules and plans. The importance of gender research in the shaping of gender equality goals transpires, for example, in the way that the deepened understanding of power found in the research has contributed to the shaping of Swedish gender equality strategy (see Prop. 1993/94:147, see also Krekula chap. 10). As several of the chapters in the anthology demonstrate, political concepts like gender equality, woman/man, immigrant woman etc. are based on notions of homogenous categories and start out from a gender theoretical understanding that was dominant in the 60s and 70s (see e.g. Bojö chap. 11; Grip chap. 9; Krekula chap. 10). However, these categorizations seem problematic in the light of contemporary *intersectional perspectives* which emphasize that narrow categorisations of political subjects could be understood as expressions of power positionings. Further, Liinason demonstrates through her contribution (chap. 13) that the transference of concepts from research includes overlaps and shifts, and that the results from gender research are used when it fits in with the goals of the state.

The intersectional perspective means that there has been a shift in the problematisation of power relations within gender research. While previous focus has been on relations *between* homogenous categories like woman/man, the perspective sheds light on differences *within* categories. It also stresses that individuals are active subjects who identify themselves with different notions of categories and who constantly change position in a broad range of asymmetrical relations (see e.g. Søndergaard 2002). The identity politics which were the starting point to concepts like gender equality, woman, good sexuality etc. are then seen, in the words of de los Reyes and Kamalis (2005, 8), as a 'an illusion of interest politics'. The intersectional perspective also means that the political implementation of gender theoretical concepts, instead of merely being described as a success for feminism, can be understood as an aspect of identity politics as well.

Thus, contemporary research points to the problematic aspects of narrow notions of categories being used as starting points for political initiatives, since this forms an institutionalisation of normative notions and focuses on the interests which benefit some positions, while others are neglected. Seyla Benhabib (2002) is one researcher who has focused on this type of problem over a long period of time, in particular in relation to gender and multiculturalism. She argues that a dialogue on socially and politically relevant issues needs to be held within a discourse ethical framework where the principles of universal respect and egalitarian mutuality are central. These principles demand everyone's right to participate in the political dialogue, as well as everyone's right to pose new questions, implement new perspectives and demand just conditions for dialogue. A gender political dialogue that is held on discourse ethical premises decreases the risk of certain interested parties creating an interpretational advantage which becomes normative, or for that matter, that the rights of groups are given priority ahead of the rights of the individual.

Religion is a phenomenon which more often than not proves to have relevance to dialogues on gender and multiculturalism, and religion has in many ways returned to the public sphere recently. However, religion is still a dimension which is often neglected in feminism as well as in gender research. De los Reyes (2010, 8) points out that the gender equality paradigm in many respects is held captive in a modernity ideal where it is not only the idea of gender as two separate categories that is being held as central, but also a secular positioning which brings an anti-religious attitude where religion is connected with patriarchal oppression and women's subordination, without any further reflection. A religious identity risks becoming a stigma to women, an identity aspect which might cause the people around them to question their credibility when engaging in gender equality issues or feminist

discourse in general, in particular if their religion is seen as ‘foreign’ in the European context. That there are no simple connections between religion and gender equality transpires in Boasdotir’s article (chap. 12) which deals with the tension between the heteronormative notions of the traditional Christian theology and the equally Christian, radical queer theology in relation to multi-sexuality and sexual rights. It becomes apparent that religion can be used for feminist purposes, as well as maintaining patriarchal and androcentric systems.

Further problematisation of concepts and discourses which have been implemented in the political sphere is therefore an important challenge to researchers. There is a need for greater transparency of the political adaptation of gender concepts and observations and of the consequences that these have on different groups of people. To request such a debate does not equal a critique of gender research as such being implemented in politics. A continuous transference of theoretical concepts to the political debate is necessary since gender research is also political: it distinguishes between power relations and problematises established assumptions and aims to bring about societal change. If previous political goals have been based on notions of homogenous categories and identity politics, the challenge ought instead to be seen in terms of creating a new visionary and strategic discussion on individuals’ equal rights and obligations, with the starting point in gender research.

The contributions in this book connect with Benhabib’s (2002) statement that a gender politically relevant dialogue and debate is being held and must be held in both official political rooms and elected congregations, as well as in unofficial and non-institutional contexts. At the same time, the articles contribute to a debate developing in that direction by shedding light on areas where the politically adapted gender research would benefit from intersectional perspectives. Thus, they demonstrate ways to attain more diverse perspectives on gender equality, support fair dialogues and create possibilities for broad groups of people to participate in the areas of gender research and gender politics.

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GENDER AND CHANGE

Research on gender aims to contribute towards a better society with the help of scientific tools. Change is therefore a key concept in gender studies. With a wide range of theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches and empirical materials from Sweden, Norway and Iceland, this book investigates how gender relations are shaped, reproduced, and challenged. Collectively, the papers in this volume point to where we are heading in terms of gender relations. Where are the seeds to change, and how does power make possible or impede on change?

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